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THE SEA RECREANT

OR, Red Hand's Death Leap

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

THE HEIRS OF HARCOURT.

It was in the long ago, before the "Stars and Stripes" had found a home upon land and sea, that the representative of one of Old England's proudest families left the halls of his ancestors and crossed the Atlantic to build for himself an abiding-place in the New World.

He was of high rank, and had served his king well as the commander of a vessel-of-war.

Yet, withal, he closed his mansion, left an agent in charge, and sailed for America in a brig that carried all that



WITH A BOUND THE DARING YOUNG LEADER WAS UPON DECK, FOLLOWED BY
HIS DOZEN MEN.

he cared to take with him to his trans-Atlantic home.

His family consisted of two sons, about whom there was the odd circumstance that no one, other than the father, seemed to know which was the oldest.

These were bright lads, then somewhere in their tenth year, it was thought, but if twins their father had never said so, and the three old family servants brought along were too circumspect to talk about matters that did not concern them.

At a spot on the shores of New York Bay, now known as Bay Ridge, the old English naval officer made his home, and the ruins of his old-time mansion of stone still stand, few knowing the romantic story of its past.

As the brig stood into the harbor of New York, the beautiful wooded shores of Bay Ridge attracted the gaze of the Englishman, and dropping anchor in a small cove, he landed and began a survey of the surroundings.

Above all places it was the one he sought, and after a few days the land was purchased, consisting of several thousand acres, then sold for a mere song, and a site chosen for the mansion.

There was a natural park of fine trees about it, sloping lawns to the water's edge, and rich lands in the rear to cultivate.

From the quarries on Staten Island the best of gray stone was brought and half a hundred men were set to work building the mansion and out-buildings, and after six months, before the cold weather set in, "My Lord Rosser Harcourt" was most comfortably located in his new home, which was built in imitation of Oakmere, the dwelling-place of his ancestors in England.

"Graystone" he had called his American home, and though it was as grand as any mansion then in the colonies, Lord Harcourt lived a life of utter seclusion.

He had employed upon his estate a number of field laborers, cultivating his broad acres, but in his household he had but the three servants whom he had brought with him from England.

One of these was his cook and housekeeper combined, another served as both his valet and butler, and the third acted as tutor, companion and servant to his two sons, Lionel and Vernon Harcourt, neither of whom, as I have said, knew which was the elder nor upon whom the title and riches of Lord Harcourt would descend.

But upon this score the lads did not disturb themselves. They were bright, handsome boys, athletic for their years, graceful, courtly and fearless to recklessness.

They perfectly reveled in the new life they led, for game was plentiful and the adjacent waters were full of fish and the very place for sailing in their little yacht.

The stables were well supplied with horses, and they were wont to ride far into the interior of Long Island.

They had their hours for study, and they were trained to allow nothing to prevent their dining with their august father each day, whatever the hours they might care to breakfast and lunch.

The library was well-stocked with books, and Touton, the man of multitudinous duties, was wont to read to all each night in the library such books as Lord Harcourt bade him use.

Touton was known by no other name, and though he spoke English well, there was about it a slight accent and about him a look as though he was a foreigner, with the chances in favor of his being a Spaniard.

He was a man of superb physique, had left behind him two-score years of life, and had the face of one who was trying to forget the past, took the present as it came and held no high hopes for the future.

He was an expert swordsman, sketched and painted with skillful hand, spoke French and Spanish with the same fluency he did English and certainly possessed a remarkably fine education.

He had served on the vessel with Lord Harcourt in some non-commissioned capacity, and the two boys took to him at once when he became their tutor and companion.

When they had, with boyish curiosity, tried to draw him out about his past, he was as silent as a Sphinx.

Yet they wondered that Touton could do almost anything he wished, for he taught them to shoot, ride, sail a boat and to swim, while he did not neglect to instruct them in sketching, music and several languages.

Lord Harcourt was a stern, silent man, except with his two boys and Touton.

Then, at dinner and in the evenings when they were together in the library, he proved himself a most charming companion even for the youngsters.

He courted no society, seldom went up to the city, and seemed happy in his quiet way in looking to the affairs of his estate.

Though a lord, he had his farm-hands address him simply as "Captain," and so did Touton, the butler and the cook call him.

So the time passed on until Lionel and Vernon Harcourt reached their eighteenth year, and one afternoon the pretty yacht Frolic sailed for the city, bearing the tutor and the two boys on a shopping tour.

As it looked like a storm when they ran along-side of a deserted pier, Lionel remained on board to lower sail and make all shipshape for bad weather, while Touton and Vernon went on up to the shops to make their purchases and to get the last English mail.

Having gotten his yacht in trim Lionel went into the cabin to get his jacket and join his brother and the tutor, when, suddenly, the companionway was darkened behind him, and the next instant two men sprang upon him.

The youth was plucky and possessed great strength for one of his years, and he made a desperate struggle; but he was overcome at last, bound and gagged, and stowed away in a bunk in the little cabin.

Then others came on board, sail was set and the Frolic went flying down the harbor before the freshening breeze with the brave boy a prisoner in her cabin, and in the power of desperate men.

CHAPTER II.

THE SEA ROVER'S PLOT.

THE Frolic was a fast yacht, and stanch as well, and she flew through the waters, now rough under the stiff east wind, and was held on under a full spread of canvas.

Upon her decks were fifteen men, and, un-mindful of the fact that their young prisoner had ears, they talked about their plans, and every word was heard by Lionel.

In those days there were few dwellers upon the shores of New York Harbor, away from the city, and only here and there the light of a farm-house on the Jersey side, on Staten Island and Long Island could be seen, while the merchant fleet and vessels-of-war were all anchored off the town, near Governor's Island, or lying moored to the docks ashore.

The men who had seized the yacht were a desperate-looking set, with a foreign air and evil faces.

By their conversation Lionel learned that one of the number had gone up to the city to select a crew for some lawless work. He had made no mistake in his selection, and was telling them, as they flew along, the object he had in view.

"Mates," he said, and Lionel Harcourt overheard all, "I told you when I shipped you that I wanted you for work that paid big gold. Do I understand that any one of you wishes to back out now you are afloat? If so, now is the time for him to show his colors."

Not a word was said in reply.

"You are wise, for, had a voice been raised in dissent, overboard would that man have gone. Now a man disappointed me in getting a craft, so I hit upon this one, and she will do, for she is merely to take us to a vessel down the harbor, hiding away in a cove on lower Staten Island."

"I wanted more men, too, but dared not delay longer, as I feared we might lose our prize."

"To explain, mates, I am first officer of a schooner that flies a flag off-shore different from the one she floats in port. She has a peaceful look, but has guns in her hold, and two-score brave fellows to man them, with a full supply of small weapons for close quarters."

"In other words, the craft is a Sea Rover, free as the winds, with no port and a flag whose sable folds are tinged red with the victories she has already won upon the blue waters."

"Her captain is known as Ronaldo, the Rover, and his vessel is called the Sea Shark."

"But the craft is wounded nigh unto death; she is old and crippled, and having no haven of refuge she must soon go to Davy Jones's locker, for, though she has weathered many a storm of iron hail and filled her lockers with gold, silver and gems, the days of the Shark are numbered."

"It was on this account that the captain changed his hawk into a dove, and dropped anchor in a quiet nook on the Staten Island shore."

"To explain, my mates, there has just been completed for the King one of the trimmest crafts that ever floated. You may have seen her anchored off the lower end of Governor's Island."

A general assent followed this query, and one said:

"She's a beauty from keel to truck, and looks like a wind-chaser."

"That's the craft, my man, and my captain has his weather eye on her."

"An agent in the town told him of this beauty, and that she was armed, equipped and provisioned."

"She has on board of her but two young officers and a dozen men; for she is waiting the coming into port of the frigate Porcupine, on board of which is a young lordling, a pet of the king, who is coming across to take command, and is bringing with him four-score English tars, and then the pretty schooner is to be sent on the special duty of hunting down Ronaldo, the Rover, so you see it will be a plume in my captain's cap to take the very vessel that is designed to capture him."

"Now, mates, our crew is light from recent actions; our craft is crippled, as I said; but we are now going to capture the Destroyer, as

they have very appropriately named the new cruiser."

"We are to run down to the old schooner, and there get our captain and thirty good fellows, and return in this yacht to the anchorage of the Destroyer."

"If there are more on board than I have heard, then we will have forty-five good fellows to capture her with."

"The moment we are on board we will cast off this yacht, raise anchor, set sail and fly down the harbor."

"The Sea Shark with her few men on board will be waiting for us in the Narrows, and the transfer of booty and all else we wish to take can rapidly be made."

"Then the captain can set fire to his gallant old craft and the newly-christened Sea Shark can go flying away on her gold-gathering cruise."

"Such is the plan, my mates, and we will carry it through. There is no reason for failure, for the night and stiff wind are in our favor. This yacht sails like a witch and can soon run us back and put us on board the king's vessel."

"What say you, lads?"

The men had listened with deepest attention to the story of the pirate mate. In those days buccaneers could be picked up almost for the asking, and with gold the incentive the reckless fellows were only too glad to risk life for its possession, especially under command of the famous Ronaldo, who was said to have won the riches of a king and never to have known defeat.

Half an hour after the yacht ran into a small cove on the Staten Island shore, and lowering her sails drifted alongside of a schooner that was at anchor there.

Quickly the Frolic was made fast to the schooner, and the mate and his crew boarded the pirate craft, the former going at once into the cabin with the pirate chief.

Hardly had he done so when a form crept out of the yacht's cabin, and, unseen in the darkness by the pirates, slipped overboard into the wild waters.

They had not tied Lionel Harcourt as securely as they thought.

CHAPTER III.

A YOUNG HERO.

IN his desperate struggle with the outlaw boarders Lionel Harcourt had been badly bruised; and then, knocked senseless, he had been quickly bound, a gag thrust into his mouth, and he was thrown with no gentle hand into a curtained bunk and left to himself, his existence indeed quite forgotten by his captors.

But, though bound, half-choked with the gag, and suffering with his rough handling, Lionel was a very wide-awake young man.

His first endeavor was to get the gag from his mouth, and this after hard work he did.

Then with his teeth he began to untie the knots about his wrists, and though tedious and tiresome, he at last succeeded in freeing his hands.

Next he doubled himself up as well as he could in the narrow berth and worked away at the ropes that secured his feet.

Again he was successful, and only so at the moment the yacht glided alongside of the pirate schooner.

Then he waited, dreading lest he would be taken on board the schooner; but he heard the outlaws leave the yacht, and springing out of the bunk, he peered up out of the companion-way.

The yacht was deserted by all, and alongside rose the dark hull of the schooner.

Instantly he returned, arranged the covering from another bunk to look like a human form in the one where he had been thrown, and then slipping out of the cabin noiselessly lowered himself into the water, and struck out for the nearest point of land, on the shore, above the pirate craft.

He heard no outcry from the vessel, so knew that he was not discovered, and at last, worn out, for he was suffering from his bruises, he reached the land.

A moment did he halt and gaze about him, as though taking bearings, and then he started at a brisk walk along the beach.

He had not gone a mile before he saw the yacht come out from the shadow of the cove behind him, and go flying away toward the city.

"She has started on her mission, and I must hurry," he muttered, and he went along at a trot.

He was passed before very long by the yacht, but still held on his way to where a number of lights glimmered ahead.

He knew his ground well, and that the spot where the lights were was a village of a dozen houses, with a tavern, for off the place vessels frequently dropped anchor, and Mine Host Vandergilt, of the "Sailors' Refuge Inn" did a thriving business at times.

Lionel had frequently sailed across from Graystone, and, with his brother, was a great favorite with Landlord Vandergilt, a genial old Hollander who always kept good cheer.

It was to the Sailor's Refuge that Lionel

made his way, and he dashed into the tap-room, wet, bruised and panting.

It was not late in the evening, and quite a number of seamen were there, drinking ale and schnapps, and eating some of Mrs. Vandergilt's light bread and cheese.

All gazed at the youth in amazement, but he went straight up to the host and said:

"I wish to see you in private."

"Certainly, my lad; but what ails you?"

"I ran up to the town with Touton and Vernon, and remaining on board to get things in trim was seized by a band of pirates, bound, gagged and put into my bunk in the cabin."

"I heard all that was said, as we ran down the harbor, freed myself and swam ashore when the yacht ran alongside of a pirate schooner."

"A pirate schooner?" cried Vandergilt, in alarm.

"Yes, and it is the Sea Shark, with her captain, Ronaldo the Rover, on board."

Host Vandergilt gave vent to a Dutch malediction, for, though he spoke English perfectly, he always imprecated in his native tongue.

"There were on board the schooner forty men, and thirty of them have gone back with the fifteen who took the yacht, to seize the king's new cruiser, the Destroyer, which, with only a few men on board, lies off this end of Governor's Island."

Again Vandergilt swore both loud and deep, but being in Dutch it did not seem very terrible to Lionel, who hastily continued:

"The pirates are to run the new schooner down the harbor and lay alongside of the Sea Shark, and all on board the latter vessel is to be transferred to the captured craft. Then the old Sea Shark is to be burned, and the Destroyer is to go to sea as a pirate craft."

"There is not a vessel-of-war nearer than Kip's Bay, in East River, so I wish a number of good men, well armed, to go with me to capture the schooner in the cove below and then wait for the coming of the Destroyer, when we can surprise the pirates and retake the vessel."

Landlord Vandergilt gazed at the brave youth in amazement.

He knew that he was utterly fearless, he had seen him swim across from Grayston Cove to his shore, had admired his wonderful marksmanship with rifle and pistol, and knew that no better sailor for landlocked waters could be found.

But he was surprised at what he heard, and more so to have a mere boy offer to lead a crew to capture a pirate craft.

"You are sure about all this, Master Lionel?" he said, when he recovered from his amazement.

"I heard all that was said, and the yacht came out of the cove soon after I swam ashore, and has gone on up to the town to capture the new cruiser."

"Look! See how I am cut up, and it will tell you that I was used roughly, while my mouth was stretched from ear to ear it seemed with the gag they put in it."

"Come, Host Vandergilt, there is no time to lose. I want the men, and half a hundred will be none too many."

"And you wish to lead them, Master Lionel?"

"Why not?"

"Yes, why not, for who is better able?"

"There's about thirty lads in the tap room, and I guess we can send on board the different craft and among the villagers and get pretty nearly as many more."

"I'll tell them they are wanted for hot work and there is big prize-money back of it and you are to lead them."

"Many of them know you, Master Lionel, and they'll go, never fear."

And the landlord entered the tap-room accompanied by the youth and soon made known to those there assembled what was wanted.

It was a "nasty" night, but, with prize-money in view, the men volunteered promptly, and an hour after three boats with muffled oars pulled out of the little inlet of the bay and headed down the Narrows for the anchorage of the pirate schooner.

CHAPTER IV.

LIONEL'S RUSE.

It was a hard pull over the choppy waters to the cove where the Sea Shark lay at anchor, but the darkness of the night, the swash of the waters, booming of the winds and dash of the surf upon the shore were all in favor of the attacking force.

Lionel remembered that it had been said that the schooner would run out into the Narrows and await the coming of the captured craft.

But the strong night-glass of old Vandergilt, with which he swept the waters, showed him that there was no vessel in the Narrows, either at anchor or under way, and he thought that as the storm had made the harbor so rough, it had been decided to have the schooner await at anchor the coming of the prize, for there the transfer could be made readily, the waters being calm comparatively under the lee of the land.

Upon rounding the point into the cove, all who were looking saw the schooner the moment

after Lionel Harcourt, with old Vandergilt's glass said:

"There she is!"

The youth was still in his wet clothes, excepting his sailor's jacket, which he had exchanged for a dry one, and Host Vandergilt had supplied him with a cutlass and pair of pistols.

There were just forty-seven in the party, and each man was also armed with cutlass, or sword, and pistols, and they were determined to win or die.

Slowly the boats moved toward the schooner, dividing as they approached, so that one could board on the starboard amidships, the other on the port side, and the third over the bows.

In the latter boat was Lionel Harcourt, whom all had been willing should be their leader.

Nearer and nearer the boats drew to the schooner, and yet they were not discovered, for the watch had been only too glad to seek shelter from the cutting cold wind by crouching under the weather bulwarks.

Nearer and nearer, until the boat in the lead struck the bows, and with a bound the daring young leader was upon deck, followed by his dozen men.

Aft they swept with a rush, while the other boats ran to starboard and port, and their crews boarded quickly.

In wild alarm the watch sprung to their feet and attempted to defend their vessel, and the mate in charge, a huge fellow, confronted Lionel, firing upon him and drawing his cutlass almost at the same instant.

The bullet clipped the youth on the left shoulder, but the mate fell, run through by the daring young leader.

A few shots were fired, steel clashed against steel, and several of the attacking force fell on the decks, while the pirates were cut down in spite of their cries for quarter, until they fled to the cabin for safety.

"Hold, men! Kill no man who begs for mercy!" cried Lionel.

"Now get those prisoners in irons at once, for we must be ready for the coming of the schooner Destroyer, if they succeed in cutting her out."

"There are plenty of arms on board, so let every man get all the pistols he can carry, but our first volley upon them must be with muskets; then throw your muskets away and board with pistols and cutlasses."

"Master Lionel, you talk like an admiral," vowed Landlord Vandergilt, second in command, and he grasped the lad's hand and wrung it with unbounded admiration.

"We have the pirate schooner, Mr. Vandergilt, but they have the new one and she is yet to be won, and their force about equals ours, so we will have to fight for it," announced Lionel, coolly.

The boats, loaded with prisoners, were now towed ashore by a couple of men in the schooner's gig, which had been lowered for the purpose, and in less than half an hour it again hung at the davits.

The schooner had been searched, meanwhile, and numbers of muskets had been found ready to be transferred to the new vessel if needed.

These were quickly loaded and ranged alongside the bulwarks to leeward, every man having a couple ready at hand.

"We'll wait until she makes fast, and then I'll give the order to fire."

"Then let every man aim where he sees heads the thickest, and quickly dash down his musket and taking up the second one empty that."

"This will give us a great advantage, for we should kill or wound half of them, and the surprise will be greatly in our favor."

Such were the orders of the young leader, given in a calm voice that showed him to be not the least disconcerted by his responsibility.

Midnight had passed and one o'clock was near at hand, when around the point of the cove swept a vessel, fairly flying under the sail she had set.

Rapidly her canvas was taken in as she came along, and she glided slowly up toward the schooner at anchor.

"Ho, Orleans, we've got her!" said a clear voice, and disguising his voice Lionel returned:

"Ay, ay, captain!"

If the tones were different from what the mate's would have been, no notice was taken of it and the next instant came the order to:

"Cast the lines and belay!"

The lines were caught by the crew in waiting, and, as they were made fast, there rung out the clear, thrilling voice of young Lionel:

"Fire!"

A volley of forty muskets flashed almost as one gun, and wild cries, shrieks, curses and groans followed.

Then came the second command:

"Again, lads! fire!"

The second relay of muskets roared, and then came:

"Boarders, follow me!"

Not a shot had thus far been fired by the amazed and frightened pirates, excepting from the pistols of their daring chief.

The volleys of Lionel's men had been cruelly fatal, and the decks of the new schooner were strewn with dead and dying men.

To add to the dismay of the pirates, the new

men, just shipped that night, and who had run off with the yacht, became demoralized and fled aft, crying for quarter.

"Rally, men, and beat them back! They are but a handful!" shouted Ronaldo, and he sprang forward and cleared a space before him with his cutlass, while a few of his old crew gathered about him.

But the victorious men were now swarming over the bulwarks, from stem to stern, and the daring outlaw chief saw that fate was against him.

He emptied another pair of pistols at his foes, cut down an assailant, and sprang back among his men.

Then cries arose on all sides for quarter, and the fight was ended, and the prisoners were quickly secured.

But the bold chief was not among the dead, the wounded or the prisoners.

He had mysteriously disappeared.

And upon the deck of the new cruiser, which he had so nobly won, lay Lionel Harcourt, the young victor, a bullet from the pistol of the pirate chief in his breast.

CHAPTER V.

THE MESSENGER.

"If Master Lionel dies the victory is too dearly bought."

So said Landlord Vandergilt, as he bent over the wounded youth, and then he gave orders to get up the anchors and set sail for the anchorage off Graystone, the home of Lord Harcourt.

Fortunately the village doctor, a retired navy surgeon from England, had been brought along on the attack, and he at once set to work to examine the wounds of the brave young leader.

"This wound in the shoulder is nothing; but this bullet in the breast may cost him his life," decided the ex-surgeon.

The two vessels were now headed for Graystone Cove, and just as they arrived there the little yacht Frolic was seen running under close-reefed sails for an anchorage.

On board of it were Vernon Harcourt and Touton, who, not having been joined ashore by Lionel as he had promised, had gone in search of him.

Some one told them that they had seen the yacht stand down the harbor in the face of the storm, and they could not understand why Lionel had left them.

But they supposed he would return, and after getting their purchases had taken them to a covered dock to await his coming.

The hours crept on, and at last, looking out over the waters, Touton saw the yacht coming and made the fact known to Vernon.

In the darkness they could but dimly see her, and yet they were convinced that she ran alongside of a vessel at anchor off Governor's Island.

Then she came on, but her course was so erratic, first running before the wind and then running up sharp into the wind, that Touton cried:

"Vernon, the yacht is running away, for no one is on board of her I am certain."

Running down to the shore, he sprang into a skiff and pulled rapidly out to head off the yacht, which he knew would soon run ashore.

As she again went up into the wind he ran alongside and sprang on board the deserted yacht.

To seize the mainsheet halyards, let fly the jib and grasp the tiller was the work of an instant.

Then, with the yacht under control and the skiff in tow, he ran into the slip near where Vernon awaited him.

"No one is on board," he said, sadly.

"And Lionel?" gasped Vernon.

"God knows where he is."

"What does it mean, Touton?"

"I cannot tell; but come, let us get the things on board and run home and see what can be done."

They hastily put their purchases into the cabin, closed the companionway and shoved off, Touton at the tiller.

"Where is the schooner, Touton?" suddenly cried Vernon.

"What schooner?"

"The new cruiser, the Destroyer."

"She is gone!"

"Sure, and it was alongside the Destroyer that the yacht ran. I do not understand it."

"Perhaps Lionel made some discovery down the bay, and made a report to the officer on the cruiser?"

"But how did the Frolic come to be without any one on board?"

"She may have gotten adrift."

Thus commenting upon the strange occurrence, they sailed down the bay, and, as has been seen, ran into Graystone Cove just as the pirate schooner and the cruiser dropped anchor.

Completely mystified, they made the yacht fast to the little dock, and then met a boat as it came alongside from the cruiser.

It contained Landlord Vandergilt, the doctor, and four men who were bearing Lionel on a stretcher.

"In Heaven's name, what has happened, Mr. Vandergilt?" cried Touton.

"The young gentleman is badly wounded, but he has done that this night which few men could do," said Vandergilt, and he added:

"Run on, Master Vernon, and break the news to your father, and have a cot ready for your brother, for he has a wound that is no child's play."

Vernon quickly obeyed, and when the party reached Graystone, Lord Harcourt, stern and pale, met them at the door.

He asked no questions, but said:

"I have a room ready for him, and have sent for my physician," and he led the way to a cheerful room off the library, which was used as a guest-chamber when Graystone happened to have a guest.

"Doctor, what think you?" asked Lord Harcourt, when the youth was placed on a cot.

"I will await the coming of your physician, sir, and then extract the bullet. Not until then can I answer, sir."

"You give me no hope?"

"On the contrary, I do, my lord."

"Thank God!" and the nobleman turned away and taking the arm of Vandergilt led him into the library, followed by Touton and Vernon.

"Now, how did all this happen, sir?"

"I hope he lives, my lord, for he has done that this night that will get him an epaulette in the king's service, or my name is not Wilhelm Vandergilt," declared the landlord, with enthusiasm.

"Tell me of it, landlord; let me know what my boy has done!" and the eyes of the nobleman sparkled with pride.

Then Vandergilt told the story, as he had heard it from Lionel at first, up to the time of his coming into the tap-room of the Sailors' Refuge, wet, bruised and bleeding, and then of the boarding of the pirate schooner and the recapture of the cruiser.

"God bless my noble son!" cried Lord Harcourt, and turning to Vernon and Touton he said:

"Touton, do you hear what the boy did? Vernon, did you hear what a brother you have?"

"Now, my lord, as I cannot leave my business, and Master Lionel lies in the shadow of death, will you appoint some one to take the vessels up to the port commandant and make full report of the affair?"

"Father, let me go!" cried Vernon.

"But, can you do—"

"If Lionel could capture the vessels, I certainly can deliver them to the authorities," was the reply, and Vernon seemed hurt at the doubt implied in his father's words.

"True, you can go, and I will write you a letter to Captain Lord Hammond, and explain to him that all prize-money goes to the crew alone, for of course my son will not touch a dollar of it, as he has ample store without it."

The letter was written and was as follows:

"GRAYSTONE, Sept. 15, 17—.

"TO CAPTAIN LORD HAMMOND:—

"MY LORD:

"The bearer of this letter, my son Vernon Harcourt, will deliver into your keeping the pirate schooner Sea Shark, and a few prisoners, and also the new cruiser Destroyer retaken from the outlaws after having been captured by them.

"My son will also explain to you the capture and recapture, and permit me to add that all prize-money goes only to the crew who aided my gallant boy in the good work, for he would not accept any payment for having simply performed his duty.

"I have the honor to be, my lord,

"Your obedient servant,

"ROSSER HARCOURT,

"Late captain Royal Navy."

Armed with this letter, Vernon boarded the Destroyer, and with crews just large enough to work the vessels, set sail for the city, the pirate schooner following in the wake of the cruiser and the yacht, which was first to carry the balance of the attacking force back to the village, was then to follow on up to the town for its young master.

The sun was up when the schooners dropped anchor under the guns of a frigate and Vernon went on board to make his report.

The commandant was absent, but the next officer in command heard the story and received the letter, after which he took charge of the pirate vessel and turned the Destroyer over to her officers and crew, who had been captured by the buccaneers and placed in irons in the hold.

The names of the men who had taken part in the capture of the pirate vessel were then put down, and Vernon set sail in his yacht for home, inwardly mourning his ill-fortune at not having been the one to prove a hero, as his brother had.

CHAPTER VI.

AN OUTLAW VISITOR.

THE wound of Lionel was severe, as the doctor had said, and for awhile the chances seemed all against his living; but his splendid physique, strong constitution and determination to get well, proved the victor, and after a week it was said that he would recover.

His father and Touton had been his devoted nurses, and Vernon also was ever ready to lend a hand.

He had gone over to see old Vandergilt and had heard over and over again the story of the seizure of the yacht by the pirates, and then of the attack upon the outlaw vessel, and how the buccaneer had been fired upon when the captured cruiser came alongside and of the boarders being led by Lionel and the desperate battle that followed.

The mysterious disappearance of the chief, Ronaldo, the Rover, was commented upon, and the regret was general that he had not been taken alive.

As a number of the pirates after being wounded had sprung into the sea and were lost, it was thought that such had been Ronaldo's fate, for that he could have escaped no one could believe, especially as he was seen to have been wounded, it was thought fatally, and that reason was given for his desperate attempts to rally his men and personal attack upon Lionel Harcourt.

One day "the young hero" of the affair was sent for by the commanding officer of the king's fleet, and as Lionel still lay nearer death than life, Vernon went in his stead, to make further report of the affair.

As Touton would not, or could not, leave Lionel, Vernon got one of the men on the place, who was a fair sailor, to accompany him in the yacht, and Lord Harcourt walked down to the cove to see his son off for the city.

"I suppose you will be back to-morrow, my son?" said the nobleman.

"I expect to come, sir, soon as they let me off; so good-by, father. I hope to find Lionel much improved on my return," and the little yacht stood away from the pier.

Lord Harcourt seated himself in the little boat-house, a tastefully built affair on the end of the pier, and watched the yacht as she sped out into the open waters and disappeared toward the city.

He was about to return toward the mansion, when he distinctly heard his name spoken, though in a whisper:

"Lord Harcourt!"

"Who calls me?" and the nobleman seemed fairly startled, for there was no one in the pavilion with him.

He looked out on the pier.

No one was there!

His eye took in the sweep of the hill leading to the mansion, and then he gazed around the pavilion.

Still he saw no one.

But again came the low-spoken words:

"My Lord Harcourt!"

The words came from overhead, and again the nobleman started.

Those were days when few were devoid of superstition and a belief in the supernatural.

Lord Harcourt was not wholly an exception, and he shuddered at this mysterious calling of his name.

Was it an omen of ill to come?

But he glanced upward and there beheld a face.

It looked down through the trap leading to the loft of the pretty boat-house.

It was a face haggard, pallid, and had a wound upon the forehead. The hair was unkempt, and the eyes deep-set, but piercing.

But it was a handsome face, upon which the stamp of forty-five years had been set, and years that had marred its beauty by having been passed in evil deeds.

"It is too dark, my Lord Harcourt, for you to recognize my face, which I confess does not look its best, with a wound, and changed by suffering and almost despair."

Something in the tones denoted a sneer; but the voice was full, and had a resolute ring to it.

"My God! can I ever forget your face, your voice?" and the nobleman sunk into a seat and glanced up at the man, ten feet over his head.

"Ah! I am remembered, then, as I remembered you, though I hardly expected to find you in America," and again the words were tinged with a sneer.

"Great heavens! large as the world is, can I find no spot free from your presence?"

"It is an accidental meeting, I assure you, my dear Lord Harcourt, and not of my seeking, as you may suppose."

"Why, then, are you here, on my estate, and in hiding?"

"Ah! your estate, is it? Well, a lordly one it is, upon my word, from the sweep of it I have been able to obtain from the little air windows in this roof!

"And why am I in hiding, you ask?"

"Why, my most noble Lord Harcourt, I am in hiding because I am not desirous of being seen, for reasons you can well understand."

"You are in my power, sir."

"Yes, I grant that; but, I again tell you that I did not come here to seek you."

"I do not believe you."

"It is true, nevertheless."

"Why did you come, then?"

"For reasons over which I had no control."

"Those reasons are that you need money?"

"Well, I need aid—yes."

"I knew that you had come to demand gold of me."

"You are mistaken again, for could I have

had it otherwise, you would not have had the pleasure of seeing me here."

"You want money?"

"A trifle, perhaps."

"What do you call a trifle?"

"Twenty guineas or so."

"No more?" and the nobleman raised his brows with surprise.

"That is all the gold I need; but there is something else I wish you to do for me."

"What is it?"

"If any one attempts to come here, order them away, and I'll come down and talk to you, for my position in this hole is neither pleasant nor dignified."

As the man spoke he dropped down from the loft and faced Lord Harcourt, who glanced at him in wonder an instant.

"Great God! your appearance, your wound, your uniform, tell me that you are the missing pirate chief, Ronaldo, the Rover!" cried the startled nobleman.

"I am Ronaldo, the Red Rover, sir!" was the cool response of the Sea Recreant.

CHAPTER VII.

A SECRET POWER.

LORD HARCOURT gazed upon the man before him with a strange look upon his face.

It was a commingling of horror, dread, anger and pity.

The man was of fine presence, and, but for the dissipation stamped upon his face it would have been handsome.

He was dressed in a uniform, stained, torn, and that looked as though it had been water-soaked.

There was a wound upon his forehead, and he seemed to be suffering, for his eyes were hollow, his face haggard.

He wore a poniard in his belt, but had no other visible weapon.

"So you are the man now known as Ronaldo the Red Rover?" said the nobleman with a sneer.

"I am that Sea Recreant."

"And you have dared to come here?"

"I have."

"And will rue your bold act?"

"No, for you will say nothing of my presence here."

"Be not too sure."

"I am sure, and let me tell you, Lord Harcourt, that I did not come here to seek you. I am a pirate, granted, and you have heard enough of the Red Rover of the Gulf to know that I am a successful and a fearless one, flouting my sable flag in the very faces of the English cruisers.

"But, my vessel is old and I needed a new one. I needed more men, and I came here to get them. I learned that a fine schooner-of-war had been built and armed, and that she was to be sent under the king's favorite young officer to hunt me down, and also other pirates; so I determined to capture that vessel and so made the attempt.

"All would have gone well but for your son—"

"Ha! you know him?" cried the nobleman, eagerly.

"He gave me this wound you see. I saw him upon the deck of the vessels, and he fought like a young tiger. He is like his father, Lord Harcourt."

"Let us not speak of him, but of yourself. What do you want?"

"I'll tell you all in good time, sir. Your boy captured my vessel and retook the craft I had taken; an act that will get for him high rank in the service."

"Now I barely escaped with my life, sprung overboard and swam ashore."

"I stole a boat and crossed to this side, and here I have been ever since, and only from the talk of sailors on this pier, learned that this was your estate, and that your son had been the brave lad who had captured my vessels."

"They did not suspect that I, on whose head a price was set, was within a few feet of them."

"Then I saw you and your son approach, and he has gone to the city, and I am here at your mercy."

"Yes, at my mercy, sir."

"And you'll be merciful?"

"I know not what to do."

"Then I will tell you what to do. I need a sailor's suit, and something to hide my wound; then a score of guineas for spending-money, until I can negotiate some precious gems I carry about me."

"You can get what I need and bring them here, not forgetting some food and a bottle of wine, and I will then borrow one of your boats and go up to the town in it."

"And then?"

"Oh! I can take passage on some outward-bound vessel, I guess."

"If I do this for you will you promise never again to darken my life with your presence?"

"I will, though it is little to ask of you, and certainly I can make the promise without regret."

"I will bring you here some clothing, and food, with the money you need; now go back to your hiding-place until my return."

The nobleman turned away, while he muttered:

"I cannot refuse."

"I must serve him, or he will hang for it."

The pirate then ascended to the loft, while he said aloud, and with a look of evil upon his face:

"He will not dare to desert me in my need. I will wait."

In half an hour the nobleman returned with a bundle. Ronald eagerly grasped the food and wine he had brought, and ate with a vim that showed he was half starved.

Then he bathed his face; his wound was dressed by Lord Harcourt and he put on a suit of sailor's clothing, the tarpaulin hiding the gash in his head.

A purse of gold was handed to him, and he said:

"I am ready to depart now, my lord."

"To again become a pirate?"

"Well, I can see nothing else left for me to do, my lord."

"Some day you will hang for your crimes."

"It may be so, my lord; but I will die as I have lived, without fear."

"Take yonder boat, lying on the sand, for it is about dark now, and you can make your way to the city, for it carries a spritsail."

"Thank you."

"Now, good-by, and may it be our last meeting."

"I will say so, if you so wish it; but, one word more."

"Well?"

"You were aware that I was married?"

The nobleman started and replied, after a moment:

"Yes."

"Can you tell me aught of my wife?"

"I cannot."

"Can you tell me anything of my child?"

"No, I cannot."

The buccaneer was silent for a moment and then said:

"If they were only alive I would be a different man; but they are not, and I care nothing for the future."

"Are they dead?"

"I was told that they were lost in a small vessel that was crossing the English Channel into France. I fear that it was but too true, though I have always had a hope they were not dead and that I would yet meet them again."

"What do you think, Rosser?"

"That there is no hope that you will ever see them again."

"You heard that they were dead?"

"Yes."

"And it was never proven to have been a false report?"

"The vessel went down with all on board, I heard, and your wife and child were passengers, was the way I heard it, and it was better so than have them live to know you as you are."

"Perhaps you are right, my lord."

"Good-by."

And with a bow that smacked of mock respect the Sea Recreant picked up his cast-off clothing, walked to the beach, and was soon in the little sail-boat standing out of the cove, while Lord Rosser Harcourt stood in the pavilion watching him as he disappeared in the gathering gloom.

There was some mystery in this power which the pirate chief secretly held over the stern nobleman.

CHAPTER VIII.

UNDER FALSE COLORS.

It was the next day after the meeting of Lord Harcourt with the Red Rover, that Vernon Harcourt returned to Graystone from his visit to the post commandant at New York.

His interview with that officer had been a long one, and the youth had seemed pleased with what had been said to him.

Returning to Graystone he had found his brother still hovering between life and death.

The faithful Touton was at his side, and Lord Harcourt was near, pacing his library with stern, thoughtful mien.

"How is he?" asked Vernon, as he entered the room on tiptoe.

"The same, with perhaps the slightest change for the better," was the low reply.

"Shall I relieve you, Touton?"

"No, I am not tired."

"I will at least sit up to-night."

"I think I will do better, for I do not mind loss of sleep and know just what to do."

"Well, I will insist upon relieving you the last half of the night."

"Very well, Vernon; but what of your visit to the city?"

"I told the story over again, as before."

"The commandant should have sent Lionel a commission for what he did."

"He will doubtless do so," and so saying Vernon left the room.

Going to the library he held a short talk with his father, and then took a walk out into the grounds.

His eyes were soon attracted by the coming of the cove of a naval barge, propelled by

twelve oarsmen, and with an officer and a coxswain in the stern.

Hastily he went down toward the landing and met the officer as he sprung out upon the pier.

It was a midshipman, and he saluted politely as he said:

"Mr. Harcourt, I believe?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have an official document for you, sir, from the post commandant."

Vernon Harcourt took the large envelope handed to him, saw that it was addressed to him and broke the seal.

His face flushed as he read the following:

"HEADQUARTERS ASHORE,
"Royal Navy."

"NEW YORK, Sept. 24, 17—."

"TO VERNON HARCOURT:—"

"SIR:—I am pleased to report that it was agreed by my officers, in official meeting to day, to offer you the position of passed midshipman in the Royal Navy, in return for the valuable service you have rendered, and I here send you your warrant, with orders to report for duty on board of H. M. ship-of-war, Porcupine, upon her arrival in this port, she being now due."

"If you desire it, a request for service on the Destroyer, schooner-of-war, under Lord Leslie Avon, who is to have command, would without doubt be granted."

"Very respectfully."

"LORD HESTER HAMMOND."

"Captain Royal Navy."

The eyes of the young man sparkled as he read this, and then he glanced over the warrant sent him.

His heart was full of pride, for, so well had he filled his mission in reporting the capture of the pirate vessel, and recapture of the schooner-of-war, that his services had at once been recognized.

"Any response, sir?" asked the midshipman.

"None, sir, other than that I will express my thanks in person to Lord Hammond, and report for duty within the week."

The midshipman bowed and returned to his barge, which at once started upon its return to the city.

"Too overjoyed at his good luck to remember that a glass of wine, or a dinner in his grand home would have been most acceptable. But, he's a handsome fellow, and has nerve; so I will cultivate him when he enters the service," and the midshipman's face showed his disappointment at not having been asked up to the mansion.

Slowly toward the house went Vernon Harcourt, and he sought his father out in the library.

Lord Harcourt was pacing to and fro, his face clouded, his lips stern.

"Well, Vernon?"

"Father, what do you think of my becoming a sailor?"

"A sailor, Vernon?"

"Yes, sir, entering the Royal Navy?"

"I suppose that Lionel will get an epaulette for his service to the king."

"I suppose he will, sir; but I already have mine."

"You!"

"Yes, sir."

"You have a commission in the king's service?"

"I have a warrant as a passed midshipman, sir."

"But, for what?"

"I hinted that I would like such an appointment, and Lord Hammond sent me this by an officer just now."

He handed over the letter and warrant to his father, who glanced rapidly over both and then said:

"He is indeed kind to reward you, Vernon, for what you did, and I suppose Lionel will receive a lieutenantcy for his courage."

"I suppose so, sir; but I will get ready to join within a few days; but I shall not ask for service under Lord Leslie Avon."

"No, I think Lionel, poor boy, will have the prior right to do that."

"As for his doing so or not, father, I will request to go on service for the present in port."

"Promotion is not won in port, my son."

"I am young, sir, and can win promotion after I have learned more of my duties, and those I can learn here in port."

"Well, my son, I congratulate you upon your good fortune, and yet I will be very lonely here without you, for I suppose Lionel will also leave me as soon as he is able."

"Touton will remain."

"Yes, Touton will remain with me," said Lord Harcourt, in a low, sad tone.

Vernon Harcourt then called Touton out of Lionel's room to tell him of his good fortune, and the man bit his lip as though vexed, offering no congratulations, as the youth had expected.

"Are you sure about this, Vernon?"

"Is not there my warrant, officially sealed, Touton?"

"True."

"But, is there not some mistake?"

"How do you mean?"

"Could not this have been intended for Lionel?"

"Nonsense, Touton; don't be a fool, for is not my name in the warrant, and is not the letter to me?"

"True, and if you, for delivering the vessels and making your report, are so honored, Lionel will get a captaincy, I guess."

And Touton smiled.

But Vernon did not smile, for the words addressed to him he did not like, as they implied the thought in Touton's mind that he was sailing under false pretenses and had received honors undeserved.

CHAPTER IX.

ON DUTY.

THE gray dawn was creeping into the sick-chamber when Vernon Harcourt, who was on watch by the side of his brother, Lionel, arose and crept toward the table whereon were the medicines to be given to the wounded youth.

Since before midnight he had faithfully watched by the side of his brother, Touton having been commanded to take a night's rest by Lord Harcourt.

Each hour he had given the medicine, until the last spoonful in the glass had gone and he had to mix more.

Then he saw Post, the butler, appear in the doorway to ask how the invalid was, and he had sent him to call Touton, for the night had been a long one to him.

Just then Touton appeared, and looked wholly refreshed by his night's rest.

"He is asleep, and, I think, better. I gave him the last of his medicine half an hour ago, and mixed more in the glass. Now I will go and rest, for I wish to start for the city to-day."

With this Vernon Harcourt left the room, and Touton again became the devoted nurse.

For some time he sat by the window, while his patient appeared to be sleeping, and then, rising, took up the glass of medicine.

He approached the bed, glanced at the clock to note the time, and placed the spoon to the lips of the wounded youth.

But the lips became firmly closed at once.

"Come, Lionel, take your medicine," he said, softly.

The eyes slowly opened, but the lips remained firmly set.

"Lionel, you must take this medicine," persisted Touton, more firmly.

But the patient looked him straight in the face and kept his lips set as firmly as ever.

He placed the spoon against the lips and tried to pry them open, but a quick movement of the head spilled the medicine.

Bending over him, for he realized that the wounded youth must take the medicine according to the doctor's orders, he placed the glass to the lips; then, with an effort of strength, which he had not before shown since being wounded, Lionel's hand flew up and the glass was sent flying upon the floor, to break into atoms.

"Ah, Lionel!" said the man, reproachfully.

But the patient nurse secured another glass, mixed more medicine and approached the invalid, spoon in hand.

Instantly the lips parted and the medicine was swallowed, while a faint smile crossed the face.

"That's a good fellow, Lionel," murmured Touton, and he turned again to the window, wondering at the strange humor of contradiction which the patient had shown.

That afternoon Vernon departed for the city, to report for duty to the commandant of the port.

Two of the farm-hands accompanied him in the little yacht, to bring it back, for he declined to allow Touton to go with him, and even refused the company of his father, for Lord Harcourt had offered to go, though he had not been in the town half a dozen times since he had come to America.

When ushered into the presence of Lord Hammond, Vernon had thanked him for his kindness toward him and asked to be assigned to duty.

"Do you wish to go upon the schooner-of-war Destroyer, under the command of Captain Lord Avon?" asked the commandant.

"I would prefer, my lord, to be stationed in the harbor, until I could learn my duties better," was the reply.

"Very well; I will allow you to report on one of the port vessels, but, for the present, will send you on board of the Destroyer to take charge."

"The Porcupine, bearing Lord Avon, will soon be in port, and when he arrives he will take command with his crew, which he is to bring over with him."

"The craft is now anchored just astern of the frigate King's Own, and has on board a crew of a dozen men, under an officer who was just reported to me as having been taken ill."

"You will relieve him at once, and perhaps you may wish to change your mind about remaining in port, and go to sea."

"If so, you are at liberty to sail on the schooner, for I will speak of you to Lord Leslie Avon immediately upon his arrival."

Such was the entrance of Vernon Harcourt upon his duties as a junior officer in the king's service, and half an hour after leaving the headquarters of the commandant he found him-

self on board the beautiful vessel which his brother had retaken from the pirates.

In the hold of the vessel, in irons, were the prisoners taken, a score in number, the wounded having been removed to the hospital ashore.

Among them was the pirate officer, Brule, who had so cleverly captured Lionel and his yacht.

He was a reckless fellow, looked the thorough sailor that he was, and appeared to prefer the life of an outlaw simply from a love of danger and adventure.

As the schooner was within a cable's-length of the frigate King's Own, and directly opposite the city, while Ronaldo was believed to be at the bottom of the sea, no dread of another attempt to cut her out was entertained, and so, barely a dozen men were on board, with Vernon in command, and another middy, a youth of fourteen just appointed, as second officer.

There were in the town of New York very few who even knew of the existence of Lord Rosser Harcourt, and those few were only aware that an eccentric nobleman of wealth had built for himself an elegant house on the bay and dwelt there in apparent exile.

He was looked upon as a morose individual, one who had met with some deep sorrow in the past, and was content to live the life of a hermit, shunning all whom he knew.

His two sons were said to be twins, and one eccentricity of the father was said to be that he allowed neither of them to know which one was to be the heir to his title and estates.

Why he did so no one knew, and even the old family servants were not informed as to which of the brothers was the elder.

This was about all that a few knew of Lord Rosser Harcourt of Graystone, and his family, while many were not even aware that he had two sons, as when not seen together the youths were so much alike as to be frequently mistaken for each other.

It was therefore with little known of his antecedents, other than that his father was a nobleman of wealth, that Vernon Harcourt entered the service of his king and became the officer in charge of the beautiful schooner-of-war Destroyer.

CHAPTER X.

THE SEA RECREANT ASHORE.

WHEN Ronaldo, the Sea Recreant, saw that his vessel was in the hands of his foes and that his new captive was going to be wrested from him he bounded down into his cabin and flung himself from the stern port. It was thus he made his escape, and reappeared, as the reader has seen, in the boat-house of Graystone Hall; and, too, as the reader has seen, was allowed and even aided to go his way in peace.

Reaching the town, which he did toward midnight, the Sea Recreant ran inshore and landed, making his way into the lower quarter of the port, then occupied by seafaring men.

He seemed familiar with the locality, for it was not the pirate's first visit to New York, and he made his way to a sailor's resort on lower Maiden lane. A sign hung over the door, illumined by a lantern, and by it he saw a fairly executed painting of a light-house and beneath it the words:

"THE BEACON INN!"

The house was a long, stone structure, three stories high, and with several wings running far back toward the small street in the rear.

It had the peculiarity of three entrances, one leading into a large dining-hall, another on the right being the tap-room, and the center door, which was usually kept closed, going into the main hall of the home.

A heavy door was ajar and the adventurer, on entering, found himself in a large vestibule.

Upon the inner door that was closed was a heavy brass knocker, and this Ronaldo struck three times slowly.

Soon a chain rattled within, the inner door opened and a stout, red-faced man stood there.

"Well, comrade, whom would you see?" he asked, gazing earnestly at the visitor.

"The light-house keeper."

"Ah! you are—"

"One whose name you had best not speak here. Show me to a room."

The host obeyed, for the one who had opened the door was the landlord of the Beacon Inn, known as "Captain Larry," and to a select few as "Light-house Larry."

The visitor was soon ushered into a room on the third floor, a large, comfortable apartment that commanded a fine view over the tops of the other houses, both up the East River and down the harbor past Governor's Island.

"Your old quarters, Captain Ronaldo, and I welcome you as from the grave, for I believed you dead," and Light-house Larry grasped the hand of his outlaw guest.

"I thought you knew me better, Larry; but had I died you would have been some ten thousands better off, as you hold about that sum to my credit."

"More than that, captain, for it is nearly twelve thousand; but, how did you escape?"

"I am not one to go down in a sinking ship, Larry, so slipped my cable while I could, and ran ashore."

"Here I am, without a vessel, ashore, and without a crew as well; but, I do not despair."

"Luck is against you, just now, captain; but you are not one to haul down your colors, I take it."

"Why should I, for there is a schooner in port that I came here to secure."

"The Destroyer?"

"Yes."

"You did cut her out, but a boy thwarted you in the game, eh?"

"Who was he?"

"The son of an old nobleman who lives like an exile upon the east shore of the harbor, below. His name is Lord Rosser Harcourt."

"Ah!"

"And the lad—whose yacht it seems Brule took—escaped, and getting ashore organized a boating party and captured your schooner, for he heard all from his captors, and so was able to thwart you."

"I see, and did it well."

"I did hear that he was wounded, but that cannot have been, for a sailor told me to-day that he was to be made a midshipman at once and ordered on board the cruiser Destroyer, which is to start on a pirate-hunting expedition as soon as a pet of the king, one Lord Leslie Avon, comes over to take command."

"She won't go cruising as a pirate, Larry, not in search of rovers."

The landlord shook his head.

"You cannot cut her out again, captain."

"Why not?"

"She is anchored close under the guns of the frigate, King's Own."

"How many men on board?"

"I do not know, sir."

"Larry!"

"Yes, captain."

"I intend to have that craft."

"Will not your old cruiser do in a pinch?"

"No."

"Sue is easier to get hold of."

"I don't want her."

"You know best."

"I wish you to send out spies, find out just how many men there are on the Destroyer, and her exact distance from the frigate."

"See for yourself, captain, for there are the lights of the two vessels," and the landlord pointed from the window at the twinkling lights.

"Ah!" and the sea-rover gazed for a long while at the frigate and the little cruiser, dimly seen in the darkness.

Then he said:

"Lend me a glass here, Larry, and in the morning I'll count the crew. There may be a trap set, and others be in hiding in the hold, so I wish you to get a spy to ascertain all about her."

"Now, Larry, what about a crew?"

"The prisoners are on board the cruiser, I heard."

"Good!"

"About Brule?"

"I know nothing as to whether he is dead or alive."

"I heard that one of the prisoners was a pirate officer."

"Then it is Brule, for my other officers were killed, or seriously wounded, and there must be a score or more of my men who are there in irons."

"And you will need how many more?"

"Sixty, and you must be most careful, for a traitor could spoil all."

"I well know that, captain, and I will pick the men most carefully."

"Do so."

"And arm them?"

"Of course."

"And their pay?"

"Give them a bounty, according to what is needed, and use the money of mine you have in your hands."

"All right, captain; I'll begin work at once," and promising to send the daring rover a good supper, Larry left his guest to his own meditations.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RED HAND.

FOR some minutes after the departure of the landlord, the buccaneer did not move from his position near the door.

Then he walked over to the window and gazed long and earnestly out upon the East River, dotted here and there with the lights of craft of all kinds at anchor.

As though having impressed the scene upon his mind, he walked over to a sofa and threw himself upon it at full length, shading his eyes from the lamp's rays with his tarpaulin.

Thus half an hour passed when a rap came upon the door.

Opening it, while his hand dropped upon a weapon in his breast, he admitted a young girl bearing a tray.

He started as his eyes fell upon a most graceful form and beautiful face.

She was scarcely over eighteen, and though

she appeared as a menial, she did not look like a common servant.

"Who are you?" he asked, with admiring glance, as he arranged the table for the tray.

"I am Esther, the daughter of your host, sir, and my father asked me to serve you, as he deemed it best your presence here should not be known to the servants."

She spoke in a low, soft voice, and certainly looked very beautiful.

"I thank you, Miss Larry, and I feel honored by your kindness. I knew not that your father was married."

"My mother died years ago, and I have been attending school, sir."

"But, have you all that you wish?"

"Yes, thank you."

She bowed and retreated toward the door, which he opened for her.

"Does she know me as I am? Is she aware that her father is the agent of a pirate, the receiver of buccaneer booty? I cannot believe it," he said, and turning to the table he sat down to discuss the very tempting supper which the maiden had brought him.

There were cold chicken, a salad, delicacies, bread and butter, and a bottle of rare old Burgundy, another of sherry.

He ate his supper in silence and then threw himself down, all dressed as he was, to sleep, and slumber came to his eyes as sweetly as though his life had not been one long career of contraband adventure and crime.

As the sun arose he awoke, and glancing from his windows saw that the frigate and schooner still lay at anchor where they were, the night before.

The morning was hazy, and gathering clouds seemed to indicate coming bad weather.

Then a knock at the door, and the landlord entered with his breakfast.

"Ah, captain, you look better than you did last night."

"I feel refreshed, and will soon be myself again. I see the frigate and schooner yet at anchor."

"Yes, and what crew have you seen on board the Destroyer, for my daughter brought you the spy-glass last night?"

"From the watch there cannot be over twenty men, all told, while the officer is a beardless youth, and it strikes me one whom I have seen before."

"It is young Harcourt."

"The youth who captured my vessel?"

"The same."

"I was sure I had seen him before, for your glass is a powerful one, Larry. But, about the men on board?"

"A man from the schooner just had a glass of grog in the tap-room, and he told me that there were two midshipmen, a bo's'n and eighteen seamen on board."

"Good! Can any of them be bought?"

"That's what I got one of my men to ask him, and I have not had his report yet."

"And about a crew?"

"I have thus far forty men, and can get you the balance by to-night."

"Let it be by night, then, for the weather looks threatening, and then the Porcupine may come in at any moment and spoil all."

"I'll lose no time, captain, and report regularly during the day."

"By the way, Captain Larry, the lovely girl who brought my supper last night, said she was your daughter."

"She is."

"May I ask why you allow one so lovely to remain in this place?"

"Her mother is dead, and I have no one else to love. She dwells in my own private wing of this inn, fronting on another street, and no one knows that it is connected with my tavern."

"There she has a pleasant little home, her birds, flower-garden, books and guitar, with a horse to ride about for exercise, so she is not unhappy."

"I asked her to bring your supper from our own table, because I did not wish to trust a servant."

"And does she know me as I am?"

"No more, sir, than she knows that I am other than the world believes me, and that the fortune she will one day have has been made by selling pirate booty," and Larry spoke with some bitterness of tone.

"I am glad of it, Larry."

"I simply told her that you were an officer who had been ill-used, and would soon be all right again. I hope you said nothing to—"

"Not a word! Would I be the man to accuse myself of crime in the eyes of one so innocent and beautiful?"

"Ha! you have your glove off— I hope that Esther did not see your red hand!"

And the glance of the landlord had fallen upon the right hand of the pirate and was riveted there.

It was no wonder, for the hand, from the wrist down, was as red as blood!

It was a birth-mark, and an unfortunate one indeed, for where the red line ended at the wrist there was distinctly traced a chain, link by link, encircling it!

It was a strange look that came over the face

of the rover as the landlord spoke, and he answered, moodily:

"No, I had my glove on when your daughter was here; but it was wet and torn, and I removed it last night. Send me some gloves at once, Larry, for I never let this accursed hand be seen when ashore, or it would hang me," cried the Sea Rover, "for there cannot be another man living who wears this damning stain."

"I will send the gloves, Captain Ronaldo, or rather bring them."

"Now eat your breakfast and take all the rest you can, for your late experience has pulled you down, I see. Can I look to your wounds?"

"They are slight, but might as well be looked to. Then do not fail to have all in readiness for me to work to-night, for see! the elements are going to aid me."

And the "Red Hand," as his crew preferred to call him, pointed out of the window to the deepening haze that settled upon land and water—always a premonition of "nasty" weather to the observant sailor.

CHAPTER XII.

A STRANGE OFFICER.

MERE lad that he was, there was no doubt but that Vernon Harcourt felt his importance as he sat in the commodious and handsomely fitted-up cabin of the new naval schooner, the Destroyer.

The coming commander had sent over word that no expense should be spared in fitting out his vessel, even if they had to call upon his personal purse to pay for it, and the result was that from fore-castle to quarter-deck the schooner was in perfect trim, while below decks the crew as well as the officers had every comfort that the heart could wish.

The craft was a model of beauty, and had also been built to stand the test of rough weather as well as to sail in the lightest of breezes.

Her battery consisted of thirteen guns, five to a broadside, and three pivot heavy pieces, mounted forward, amidships and astern, while she was intended for a crew of a hundred men, if needed.

Her hull was perfect in symmetry, her masts and spars of unusual height and length, while she could spread almost as much sail as a vessel twice her tonnage.

Her bows were as sharp as a sword and unusually high, and her stern also rose above the main line, giving her a peculiar appearance, as she seemed to be low amidships.

Vernon Harcourt was a good sailor, for he had had considerable experience in short cruises, and his admiration for the beautiful vessel he held temporary command of was great.

His pride at his position shone in his eyes, as he sat in his cabin, the first night he was in charge, and ate the supper which a colored steward served.

Upon the deck, as officer of the watch, was a pigmy midshipman who paced to and fro with an ambitious stride, as though he felt himself a commodore.

As the darkness came on a dense fog swept in from the sea and soon shut the frigate out of sight.

The tide was running out like a mill-race, and almost a dead calm prevailed. Drawing his cloak about him the midshipman leant over the taffrail, and then suddenly under the stern, saw a boat in the darkness.

"Boat ahoy!" he called out, in his shrill voice.

"Ay, ay, sir! A communication from Lord Hammond," a low voice answered.

"Come alongside!"

This command was obeyed, and, a moment after, a young officer in naval uniform came aft and, saluting, said:

"A letter, sir, for Midshipman Harcourt."

"I will bear it to him," and the midshipman took the paper and descended to the cabin.

It was Vernon Harcourt's first official order, and he read it with an air of importance which was reflected from the face of his junior.

"An order, Mr. Huntley, to send you to the hospital for a dozen more of the pirate crew, whom the surgeon in charge reports can be sent on board and put in irons."

"It will be a long pull, round into North River, where the hospital is, and the order states that you are to take the following eight men, who have been picked and can be trusted, though I cannot see much danger in the bringing aboard of a few wounded pirates."

Midshipman Horace Huntley felt hurt to think his superior slighted the service he was to go on, so said:

"The men will be hanged, sir, and so are desperate, and may be hard to handle; but I will bring them, sir, and if you will give me my crew's names I will start at once."

"Do so," and the names were again read out, while Vernon Harcourt went on deck to tell the bearer of the orders that the commandant should be at once obeyed.

"I have orders to remain on board, sir, and report the safe arrival of the prisoners," the officer announced.

"Certainly, sir! Will you enter the cabin and make yourself at home, for I have to hold the deck until Mr. Huntley's return?"

The officer bowed, gave an order to his men to come on board and await his pleasure, and entered the cabin to obey the request of Vernon Harcourt and "make himself at home."

Soon after, Midshipman Huntley, with his "picked crew," started upon his mission, and Vernon Harcourt held the deck in his stead.

He did not like to exchange the pleasant cabin for the chill deck in a slight, drizzling rain; but he drew his cloak about him and resigned himself to the duty with what grace he could.

Glancing down into the cabin, he saw the young officer making the time pass pleasantly with a decanter of wine before him and a cigar in his lips.

"Can I not offer you a glass of sherry, sir?" called a pleasant voice up the companionway, and thus tempted, Vernon stepped down for an instant to accept the invitation.

"It will keep out the cold, sir," suggested the officer.

He poured out the wine, and brought the glass toward the midshipman, as he stood in the companionway.

Reaching forth his hand to take the glass, Midshipman Harcourt felt himself seized and pulled violently forward by his guest, and before he could utter a cry of alarm he received a stunning blow that laid him upon the floor of the cabin.

CHAPTER XIII.

UNDER THE GUNS OF A FRIGATE.

It was late in the afternoon when the Red Hand heard a tap at his door, and opening it he admitted Landlord Larry and a stranger.

The latter was a young man, with black hair, large eyes and a face positively handsome, though sad almost to sternness.

His form was slender and graceful, and he wore his sailor suit with a free-and-easy sort of air that was attractive, while his cap sat jauntily upon his head.

"Captain, this is the young man who has secured your crew for you, and I promised him a berth as an officer if he arranged and carried out a plot to get you the schooner."

"I need a good man, sir, for an officer. Your name, please?"

And the Red Hand turned his gaze upon the stranger.

Then he started, his face paled and he asked, huskily:

"Have we not met before, sir?"

"My name is Juan Mora, sir, and I do not recall ever having met Captain Ronaldo, the Red Rover."

"Ah! you know me, though?"

"Only as what Landlord Larry has told me you are, sir."

"You are a Spaniard?"

"A Mexican, sir."

"A sailor?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your face haunts me as one I have seen before."

"A passing resemblance, sir, to one you have known, perhaps, and I hope not unpleasantly."

And the young man smiled.

"You do not look like a man to turn pirate."

"Nor do you, sir; but fate leads us in strange paths, for we cannot control destiny."

"True, and you, like myself, are a man with a history. Larry, you know this young man?"

"I do, sir, and I will vouch for him."

"Scarcely a stronger recommendation than his face. I will accept your services, sir, and if you are successful you shall be my first officer."

"Is not that berth now filled, sir?"

"I have one, a rough, brave fellow, who has acted as such; but he is more useful to me among the men than in the cabin, and he prefers the wardroom to the cabin, so will be content."

"I thank you, sir."

"Let your deeds prove your thanks. Have you thought of any plan to cut the schooner out?"

"I already have the names of the crew on board, and eight of them must be disposed of; the balance will fight under a black flag with more good will than under the king's colors. I also have to say that I have a friend in the commandant's quarters, so can secure the use of the official seal, and it is easy to write an order sending a midshipman ashore to-night to the hospital after the wounded pirates, who of course cannot come, for those that will not die will hang."

"I will board the schooner with the order, and after one of the middies has gone with the loyal men, I will undertake to capture the other and his crew."

"Then, as it is coming on foggy, we can slip the cable, the tide will be running out, and when we pass the fort on Battery Point, you and the balance of the men can board us."

"With the boats out ahead we can feel our way down the harbor and out to sea."

"Your plan is a perfect one, Mr. Mora, and I see that you know what you are about. I leave all in your hands to carry out, and I feel that you will meet with success."

"Thank you, Captain Ronaldo," was the quiet reply.

"Have you the full complement of men, Larry?"

"Yes, sir—sixty, all told."

"And boats?"

"Four boats, sir, over on the North River shore, at different points, and where the men are to take them."

"I will go with you to the one that you are to take, captain, and the others are to join you just below Governor's Island, where you are to form in a line so that the schooner cannot pass you in the fog."

"All right, we will be sure of success."

"See, the fog deepens," and Ronaldo pointed out of the window at the increasing mist.

Three hours after Juan Mora boarded the schooner with his forged orders, and the plot to get Vernon Harcourt into the cabin worked so well that a stunning blow placed him at the mercy of his pirate visitor.

Having quickly bound and gagged the young officer, Juan Mora went on deck and calmly walked forward.

The fog was so dense that it was impossible to see half the length of the vessel, but a man stepped forward and greeted him with:

"All right, sir."

"Any trouble with the crew, Jacques?"

"Not much, sir, for I hit pretty well upon the ones who would serve, and those who would not."

"One was going to be troublesome, but I knifed him and he is food for the fishes."

"All right; now ship the cable and let the schooner go down with the tide."

"Have every man on the lookout for the boats, and to watch that we do not drift ashore."

"Yes, sir," and the man walked forward, followed by the young officer.

The men were all grouped together, those who had just come on board and the treacherous ones among the schooner's crew as well, and they were conversing in low, earnest tones, but saluted as they beheld the cloaked form of the pirate officer.

"Lads, I congratulate you upon your silent and well-done work."

"Two of you take these keys and go below to free the prisoners in the hold."

"Let there be no sound from any one, and you, Jacques, slip the cable now."

The order was given in a low tone, but all heard, and in perfect silence it was obeyed, the schooner being swiftly borne away from her anchorage by the outflowing tide, right from under the guns of the king's frigate with hundreds of watchful eyes on board.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DEPARTURE.

DARKNESS was creeping over the earth and Ronaldo could no longer see the shipping in the harbor for a dense fog was settling upon all.

He was perfectly calm in manner, his face showing only firm resolve, and turning from the window he threw himself into an easy-chair and became lost in thought.

What was in his mind his face did not reveal, and yet his brain was busy.

The room grew dark and there came a light knock at the door.

Opening it, he found Esther Larry there with a lamp.

"I have brought you a lamp, sir," she said, and her manner seemed confused.

"Thank you."

And he took it from her.

But she did not depart, and after a moment asked:

"Do you leave to-night, sir?"

"I hope to do so, Miss Larry."

"And does Juan Mora accompany you?"

The pirate was at once on his guard. How was it that the daughter of Landlord Larry knew aught of his young lieutenant?

"I can tell you nothing, Miss Larry," he answered.

"Does that mean that you will not?"

"It means that I have been unfortunate of late, and, being an old friend of your father, he has been kind enough to aid me."

"I expect to leave town soon, and he introduced to me a Mr. Juan Mora as a young gentleman who would aid me in my departure."

"And where will you go, may I ask?"

"I am a sailor, so will go to sea."

"And Juan Mora?"

"You must question him as to his movements, Miss Larry."

The pirate chief thought the maiden sighed, and he felt that there must be a love-affair between the two, closely as the landlord guarded his beautiful daughter.

"Will you answer me a blunt question?" she asked.

"I will if I can."

"Who are you?"

The Sea Rover started slightly, but replied:

"An unfortunate sailor, one whose acts have brought upon him the censure of the king."

"Is that all?"

"What more can I say?"

"And Juan Mora goes as your friend?"

"He serves me from the friendship he feels for your father."

The girl's face wore a troubled look. Whatever was in her mind as to who was the mys-

terious personage in hiding beneath her father's roof, it was evident that she was troubled, that she had been thwarted in an endeavor to make some discovery.

"Good-by, sir, for I do not suppose we will ever meet again," and she held out her hand.

The buccaneer grasped it, bent over and kissed the taper fingers, while he said:

"And I hope that we will meet again, fair lady."

As he uttered the words, the eyes of Esther fell upon his hand, with its blood red stain to the wrist, for he had left it ungloved, and, with a cry of terror, she rushed from the room.

"Great God! my accursed red hand, which I left ungloved, has frightened her!" said the Rover, as the door closed behind the flying girl.

His face was now livid, and he began to pace to and fro with a quarter-deck step. Then he stepped to the table, and, taking up a pair of the gloves which Landlord Larry had brought him, he quickly drew them on.

As he did so Larry entered.

A glance at his face showed that it was serene, so Ronaldo felt assured that he had not seen his daughter, and was surprised when Larry said:

"I just saw my daughter, and she said that she had brought you a lamp, though I had not told her to do so."

"Did she nothing more?"

"What more could she say?"

"She asked me who I was."

"Indeed?"

"She did."

"And your answer?"

"That I was an unfortunate sailor who had angered the king."

The landlord gave a sigh of relief, and said:

"I would not have her get a suspicion of the truth for half my fortune."

"Nor I, for I would not wish to seem wicked in the eyes of one so pure; but I was afraid that she might suspect me and Juan Mora."

"She does not know Mora, and could hold suspicion against you merely from your being in hiding here, and that I told her you were at present under a cloud."

Ronaldo made no reply, but the words of the innkeeper proved that he did not know his daughter as well as he supposed, for she certainly was acquainted with Juan Mora?

Larry now informed him that the men had been sent to their respective boats, Juan Mora had gone to board the schooner with his forged orders, and that he was ready to conduct him to where he would find a barge awaiting him.

"Here, captain, is your money, less expenses and bounty, and I hope soon to have another cargo of booty to sell for you," and Larry counted out the gold as he spoke.

Ronaldo mechanically thrust it into a sachel, threw a cloak, which the landlord had brought for him, over his shoulders, and the two left the room.

Going through a long corridor, the landlord lighting the way with a lantern, they at last entered a door leading into a room.

Within was a closet, as it appeared, but the floor rose as a spring was touched, revealing a flight of stairs, and descending these they came to another corridor which led into a room by a secret door, that had the appearance of being a panel in the wall.

"I let you into my secret, Captain Ronaldo, for this is the connecting way between my tavern and my house."

"I thus live a dual life, and in Leonard Laurie, the well-to-do merchant, and Light-house Larry, the keeper of the Beacon Inn, there is a vast deal of difference."

Ronaldo gave no reply, and the landlord made a few changes in his appearance, and then led him out of the neat little house into a quiet street.

Rapidly the two walked along the streets, which were obscure under the dense fog, and after going some distance came upon the shores of the North River.

Several vessels were lying alongside of the wooden jetties, but others a short distance away, anchored in the stream, could not be seen.

"The very night for our work, landlord," whispered the Sea Recreant.

"Yes, but if you fail, you know where to find refuge, captain. Here is your boat."

In the darkness a boat was seen a few yards away upon the waters; but a low call from the landlord caused a splash of oars, and it came to the shore.

"Men, this is your captain. Good-night!" and the landlord grasped the hand of the Sea Rover, who said in a low voice:

"A pirate's prayers attend you, my friend."

Then he stepped into the boat, gave an order to the oarsmen and disappeared in the gloom and fog.

CHAPTER XV.

A CHANGE OF FLAGS.

THE coxswain of the large boat which Ronaldo had entered, had already received his orders, for he steered in a direction which would bring him upon the shore of Governor's Island.

He made his calculations well, for the boat

touched upon the island ere the land could be seen in the fog.

Then two men sprang out, one going in one direction the other in another, and the coxswain explained to the chief, who thus far had not spoken, that they were searching for the other three boats.

In twenty minutes they returned, and coming along the shore were the three boats, one from the upper end, and two from the lower end of the island.

A rope was then passed to a man in the bow of each boat, to prevent their being separated in the fog and impenetrable darkness.

That any other craft than the schooner to be cut out, would be moving on such a night, no one believed, and so the four boats were to stretch across the mouth of the river, from above the fort on the island, to near the Battery on the New York shore; so the cruiser could not sweep down with the tide without being caught in the rope line.

The two boats nearest each shore dropped an anchor to hold them in place against the tide, and in dead silence all waited.

The sounds from the town slowly died away, as the night wore on, and not a light was visible through the dense fog.

So thick indeed was the mist that the tightening of the rope alone told the watchers in the boats that they had caught some object on their line.

"It is the schooner," said the sea bandit in a low tone, and the vessel swept on, towing the four barges with it.

As they went along the boats began to follow the line to the schooner, and as the vessel swept into the broad waters flowing out of the North River and mingling with the current of the East River, the daring chief stepped on board the prize which he had won.

"Keep the boats alongside by short tow-lines for fear of accidents, letting one lead a cable's length ahead to feel the way," Ronaldo ordered.

As he stepped on board the schooner two men met him at the gangway: one was his old lieutenant, Brule; the other was Juan Mora, his new officer, who had so successfully cut out the schooner.

"Chief, I congratulate you," said Brule, earnestly.

"I think you are the one to be most congratulated, Brule, for your neck was in a noose; but, Mr. Mora, I thank you for this night's work."

"I am glad to have deserved your thanks, Captain Ronaldo; but we are not yet out of danger, for did we drive ashore on this tide we would stick there."

"I have a boat out ahead, and the others alongside with short tow-lines to back water if we drift near shore. We cannot fail after going thus far."

"Brule, it was a surprise to you to save your neck, eh?"

"Indeed it was, Chief Red Hand, and I could hardly believe what this young officer told me—that you were alive and would soon be on this deck again with a crew."

"It was true, though, as you see, and Juan Mora has won the place of first officer by this night's work, Brule, while you of course are second."

"I don't begrudge him his place, chief, and I am content as second luff, for he has saved me from the yard-arm," was the ready reply, and Juan Mora grasped his hand, for it told him that he had nothing to fear from the pirate lieutenant whose place he had stepped into.

"And the schooner's crew, Mora?"

"Are below, sir."

"How many?"

"A midshipman, a negro and twelve men."

"I thought it best to put the middy in irons, and keep the schooner's crew below decks until we were out of the harbor, or you came on board."

"You did right, sir, for one traitor might cause us much trouble, perhaps cause our recapture, as a frigate and sloop-of-war lie at anchor in the Narrows."

"But this midshipman, I hope you did not harm him?"

"No, sir; I took him unawares and felled him with a blow, putting the irons on him while he was stunned."

"Is he all right now?"

"Yes, sir, but very indignant, and I had to threaten him with a gag to keep him quiet. Will you put him ashore, sir?"

"No; I shall take him on a cruise with me," was the quiet rejoinder, and Ronaldo, remembering where Landlord Larry had reported the frigate and the sloop-of-war to be at anchor, gave orders for the boats to tow the schooner over toward the Staten Island shore and follow it along as close as possible, so as to avoid them.

The oars were muffled, and one boat went out ahead to give the order to the one in the lead, and slowly the schooner bore to starboard until the wash of the waves upon the island beach could be heard, for nothing could be seen.

So the captured craft swept on with the tide, not daring to set a sail, or shape a course, until the cooler breeze from the ocean fanned the

faces of the crew and they knew that they were in the Narrows.

Then there came a crash ahead, cries, a sharp order, and a light loomed up in the fog.

The leading boat had dashed into one of the vessels-of-war at anchor in the Narrows!

Loud commands were heard, a boatswain's whistle, the roll of a drum beating to quarters, and hurrying feet, and over the decks of the schooner loomed up the huge hull and spars of a frigate.

A moment the schooner hung against the huge spars, but already had the pirate chief ordered a score of men up aloft, and in an instant almost she swung clear and swept away under the strong impulse of the oarsmen in the four boats.

"Fire!"

The command came from the frigate; a gun sent forth a red flame, and a huge ball flew over the schooner's deck.

But no damage was done, and in the next second the fugitive craft was lost to sight and was being towed straight away from the frigate.

Blue lights were burned upon the frigate, but the haze almost obscured them, and at random a broadside was fired, the iron hail striking upon the Staten Island hills.

A shot came from over on the Long Island shore to let the frigate know the position of her consort, the sloop-of-war, and then a scattering fire was kept up at random from each vessel in hopes of striking the strange craft.

But the tide bore the schooner on, aided by the towing boats, and she escaped unharmed, though shot flew about her time and again.

Not a sound was heard from the stern chief who commanded the destinies of the fugitive craft, and his men seemed to understand that they were to do their work in utter silence.

At last, as the schooner began to ride the waves of the Lower Bay, the Red Hand said:

"That firing was the baptism of our schooner, Mr. Mora, so run up the black flag you brought with you, night though it is, and she shall soon find a victim worthy of her name and change of colors."

CHAPTER XVI.

SHOWING HER HEELS.

HAVING passed through the dangerous ordeal of running the gantlet of two vessels-of-war, or rather of floating by them, Ronaldo seemed to feel that there was little before him to dread.

He was well aware that the frigate and sloop would not dare leave their anchorage in the dense fog, and therefore he could go on with the tide for several miles and then drop anchor, so that he should have a good start of his foes when the morning should come and the mist drift away.

To attempt to go out on the tide to the sea he knew was risky in the extreme, for he might be borne upon a shoal or ashore, and as the waters were running out he would have to stick there until the next coming in of the tide.

So the Sea Recreant, his boats out ahead, swept on until he knew that he was out of range of the frigate's guns; then he gave orders to let go the anchors and for the men to board.

The fog was still so dense that he could not see the length of his vessel, and there was hardly a breath of air; but he got the men on deck and at once ordered them to be told off to duty.

He was not one to be caught napping with a new crew, and he wished them to understand what their duties were, and to know where their posts were.

Fortunately for him Juan Mora and Landlord Larry had selected well, for nearly every man on board had served on a vessel-of-war.

A third officer was selected, gunners appointed, the old boatswain of the Sea Shark was told to take the same place on the new schooner, and a carpenter, sailmaker, and coxswains were assigned to duty.

The gun crews were formed, and thus in his quiet way that marked the perfect disciplinarian, Ronaldo had his crew ready for work when the dawn broke.

As the sun rose the fog grew less dense, and gradually the mist began to rise from the waters, while a light breeze was springing up.

The boats in which the men had come off to the schooner were taken in tow astern—none of those belonging to the vessel having been lowered from the davits.

The sails were unfurled and set, and the men stood at the windlass ready to raise the anchor at a moment's notice.

At last a ray of sunshine broke through the cloud's of mist, and Ronaldo's voice rung out with his first loud command:

"Up with that anchor, men!"

The seamen sprang to their work and in a few moments the anchor was apeak.

Just where he was the Sea Recreant did not know, more than that he was somewhere in the Lower Bay, but whether the tide had carried him over toward the Jersey coast, or on the Long Island shore he could not tell.

To discover where he was he must wait until he could catch a glimpse of the land.

Brighter shone the sun, lighter grew the mist and more briskly blew the wind.

The tide was now running in, and the schooner was kept barely moving, with shivering sails and lookouts on every side.

"Land ho!" suddenly called out Mora, as he caught sight of a dark object ahead.

But, instantly after, came the warning cry:

"It is a frigate at anchor!"

This fact all now recognized, and every eye was turned upon the chief.

Would he be equal to the emergency, thought his crew?

All felt that they had run upon the frigate again in the fog, and that the sloop could not be far away.

With no sight of the sun, no point of the compass visible, it was supposed that the schooner had been turned around and was making back into the Narrows.

But, Ronaldo was equal to the emergency. He glanced over the side and saw which way the tide flowed, and this told him that it was not the frigate that had been in the Narrows.

An open space revealed the vessel quite plainly, and he saw that she was weather-beaten, as though from a long voyage.

All this had taken but a few seconds, and then he spoke promptly:

"Mr. Mora, lower that black flag quickly, and run up the English ensign. Helmsman, hold her as she is, and I will hail, for yonder vessel is the Porcupine."

To have attempted to go about would have attracted the attention of those on board the frigate, which lay at anchor dead ahead, and her broadside might have sunk the schooner.

Then Ronaldo knew not which way to go in the fog, and the frigate might be at anchor directly in the channel leading out to sea.

Her firing would cause the frigate and sloop to slip their cables and come down, and he would be thus caught between three fires when the fog lifted.

So he boldly decided to brave the affair out, and the schooner held on toward the frigate.

The little vessel was now seen by the officer of the deck on the frigate and the men were called quickly to quarters, others went aloft to set sail and a crew sent to man the windlass.

But the black flag had been replaced by the British ensign, and the schooner held on directly toward the frigate.

"Frigate, ahoy! Is that the Porcupine?" cried Ronaldo, anxious to get the first word.

"Ay, ay! What craft is that?" answered a gruff voice.

"The king's courier Destroyer, sent to overhaul the pirate craft, Sea Shark. Have you seen the pirate, sir?"

"No; but what was that firing a few hours ago?"

"A frigate and sloop-of-war, which are astern of me, firing on the pirate, who must be somewhere near."

"No one can see anything in this accursed fog, so he might be at anchor within hearing. Is that the new schooner built for Lord Leslie Avon?"

"Yes, sir; and we have on board a make-shift crew. I am Lord Rosser Harcourt, and I volunteered for the chase of the pirate, Ronaldo, who boldly came into port."

"I will stand on, sir, and hunt in yonder fog-bank; but may I ask where you are?"

"We came in last evening and dropped anchor when the fog came on. We are about a league from the light-house on Sandy Hook, north by east."

"Ay, ay, sir; and thank you."

And the schooner, which had been barely moving as she passed close under the stern of the huge frigate, sailed on and disappeared in the fog, while the crew could hardly refrain from giving their captain three rousing cheers for the nerve he had shown at a most trying minute.

But hardly had the schooner disappeared when a vessel came in sight from the deck of the Porcupine; then another, a cable's length off the port side of the first one to appear.

They were the frigate and the sloop feeling their way down the harbor.

They had sail enough to stem the tide and give them a speed of three knots an hour, and they had boats cut ahead, holding their distance, casting the lead and reporting back to the decks of their respective vessels.

The two commanders were in deadly earnest, for their risk was great in creeping out to sea.

Their crews were at their guns, and men crowded the rigging, ready to spread sail the moment they saw the pirate.

As they came into view of the Porcupine, for a moment all was excitement, but the vessel was quickly recognized by some officer on board, and a stern voice hailed from the sloop:

"Frigate ahoy! Is that the Porcupine?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Have you seen anything of an armed schooner?"

"Ay, ay, sir! She passed not ten minutes ago, and reported you astern, and in chase of a pirate."

"It was the pirate himself, for he cut out the schooner-of-war Destroyer last night. Where was he when last seen?"

"Due south in yonder fog-bank."

Then came the order from the frigate's commander to wear round and fire, and her broadside sent a shower of iron flying into the bank of fog.

The sloop-of-war followed suit, and hardly had the echo of her guns died away before the Porcupine's heavy broadside was sent after the fugitive craft.

"If the schooner escapes that tornado of iron, she is a lucky craft, that is certain," cried an officer on the deck of the Porcupine, and his opinion was shared by all on board the other vessels.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CHASE.

THE Porcupine was a fleet vessel, the fastest in fact among the large frigates in the British Navy, and her commander was anxious to join in the chase after the pirate, if he had not already been crippled or sunk by the broadsides poured upon him.

The commander of the Porcupine was the more urged to do this by the fact that he had on board Captain Lord Leslie Avon, the young officer who had come out to America to go pirate-hunting, and whose craft the Red Hand had taken for his own use.

Lord Leslie Avon was a handsome young man, scarcely twenty-five, and came of a noble old family.

He had distinguished himself in foreign wars as a midshipman, afterward won promotion for gallant conduct, and had been given the command of the Destroyer by the king, who greatly admired the young officer.

Lord Leslie had not inherited much money, though his estates were large and unincumbered with mortgages, and being a trifle wild, he was in need of funds, so had conceived the brilliant idea of capturing pirate vessels, loaded with treasure, to enrich himself.

So it was the Destroyer had been built and armed, and with a picked crew Lord Leslie was on his way to take command, and arrived to discover that the pirate Ronaldo had captured his vessel.

"We must retake her, Captain Travis, and it will be a great thing for us to do, so I beg you to go in chase," urged Lord Leslie, after the arrival of the frigate and sloop had made known how the Porcupine's commander had been duped by the cunning Sea Recreant.

The anchor was gotten up in haste, sail was crowded on, and the Porcupine, just from a long voyage, in the very sight of port, set sail in chase of the daring Rover.

The frigate and sloop, as the mist was rising, also pressed on, to find that they had a swift rival in the Porcupine, which was gaining upon them rapidly.

The firing of the heavy guns had helped to disperse the fog, and soon the bank of mist ahead arose and all gazed anxiously for the fugitive schooner.

Had she been sunk? She was not in view.

Then they saw that they were heading toward the Long Island shore, and, as the fog seaward arose, the schooner was discovered to the southward, rounding the point of Sandy Hook.

The clever pirate had sailed away from the Porcupine in one direction, but when obscured by the fog once more, had headed directly toward the Horse Shoe of Sandy Hook.

Thus, when the vessels-of-war were pouring their fire into the place where the schooner had last been seen, that nimble craft was a mile to leeward of it, and running for the sea by sharply rounding the Hook, for the fog was less dense and the low, sandy shore could be seen from her decks.

Already when again discovered, the Destroyer had the sandy point of land between her and her pursuers, and only her canvas could be seen from the decks of the war-vessels.

But, they opened hotly, and a fearful rain of iron fell about the fugitive craft, while the three cruisers pressed on all sail in chase.

The schooner was now under a cloud of canvas, and was fairly flying over the sunlit waters, as the fog had left the sea and floated landward.

With a start of nearly half a league it was not an easy matter to catch the fleet craft, so all depended upon wounding her.

The Porcupine's commander signaled to the frigate and sloop to fire rapidly, while he, having the fleetest vessel, would press on in chase, and this was done.

The boats in tow of the schooner had been cut loose, as they retarded her speed, and were no longer of use, and with the wind freshening to a ten-knot breeze, the beautiful little craft was making it tell.

"I'll give the men a little practice at the guns, Mr. Mora," said Ronaldo, and he ordered the pivot-guns trained upon the Porcupine.

"It will let the commander that was to have been, get a taste of her mettle. I was just in time in cutting her out," and he smiled his satisfaction.

The pivot-guns of the schooner opened, and after a little practice the gun crews began to fire rapidly and aim well, for shot after shot struck the Porcupine.

As the wind freshened still more, Ronaldo closely watched the behavior of his prize. She

was bowling along, almost upon a level keel, though the canvas set was enormous, and the decks were perfectly dry. She had run out of range of the frigate and sloop-of-war, though both were still pursuing; and was drawing away from the Porcupine, though that vessel was a mass of canvas clouds from deck to truck.

Seeing that she was being outfooted, the Porcupine, as she rounded the Hook, sent a broadside after the flying schooner, and then once more pressed on in chase.

"Mr. Brule, go and ask Midshipman Harcourt to come on deck," ordered Ronaldo, paying no attention to the last broadside, though several of the iron balls flew very near his head.

"Shall I knock off his irons, sir?"

"Yes."

A few moments after Vernon Harcourt appeared on deck.

His face was pale and haggard, for he had slept none during the night, and there was a bruised spot upon his temple, from the stunning blow given him by Juan Mora.

"Midshipman Harcourt, I believe?" said Ronaldo politely, gazing with deep interest into the face of his handsome young prisoner.

"Such is my name and rank."

"Are you aware whose prisoner you are?"

"Ronaldo the Red Hand I believe you are?"

"I am so-called, sir, and I regret to have had to deprive you of your command; but, as you are well aware, I went to New York to cut this vessel out, but in the moment of triumph was thwarted most cleverly," and Ronaldo smiled.

"I tried again, and this time with success, as you see, and I feel honored to have as my guest on a piratical cruise, a king's officer."

"You see, sir, that we are pursued by three of the king's vessels, but we are rapidly leaving them and are almost out of danger, so I sent for you that you might enjoy the chase."

But the angry face of Vernon Harcourt showed that he did not enjoy the chase, and he said hotly:

"Do you mean to keep me as a prisoner on board of your vessel, while you sail under the pirate flag?"

"I certainly do, sir, for as the heir to the title and estates of Harcourt, and also as a king's officer, you will be a valuable hostage, I assure you, and I can, when need arises, dictate terms through you."

"Now, Midshipman Harcourt, I wish you to witness an execution at the yard-arm," and turning to Juan Mora, Ronaldo gave an order in a low tone; that officer walked rapidly forward, while young Harcourt wondered at the strange words of the pirate chief.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE FIRST VICTIM.

WHEN the boats had been ordered on board the schooner there was found in one of them a man who had been securely bound and gagged by his comrades.

This man was the one who had reported himself as a pilot of the harbor and who had said that he could feel his way out to sea in the fog, dense as it was. He had been ordered into the boat in the lead, and appeared to be most anxious to do his duty. He lay in the bow of the boat, a glass to his eyes, and seemed trying to pierce the gloom and mist.

For some reason there was one man on board the boat who suspected him, and he watched him closely. He kept his suspicions to himself, however, and saw him lean over the bows and hold his hand down near the water.

It did not take him very long to see that he held a bull's-eye dark lantern in his hand and was casting a streak of light ahead. It could not be to see his way, but to attract attention.

Then, too, every now and then the pilot would speak out aloud, where others spoke in whispers.

So closely was the man whose suspicions were aroused watching the pilot that he had failed to look ahead, and only did so when he heard a sound near.

A glance showed him that they were moving directly upon a large vessel at anchor. And more, he saw that the pilot had seen the frigate and was deliberately going toward it!

He gave a low warning cry, ordered the oarsmen to back water, and yet it was too late, for the boats crashed into the frigate's side and several of the oars were broken.

But the men did not lose their presence of mind and were soon away, while a warning was shouted to the schooner.

When the boat was again lost in the fog and the stern-line was taut that held it to the schooner the men saw that their pilot was on his back and a comrade bending over him knife in hand.

"Lads, this man is a traitor, for he led us directly upon the frigate," cried the seaman.

"Don't kill me, mates, for I was only doing what I thought my duty in not allowing a pirate to escape to sea with a king's cruiser," whined the man, whose nerve had left him.

"I will see that you lead us into no more traps," said his captor, and he at once bound and gagged him.

When the boats went aboard the schooner, after the gantlet that had been run, the traitor was taken before the chief.

"Ah! only one? I feared there would be more," said Ronaldo, and he sent the man below in irons.

When he was appointing his officers, Ronaldo asked:

"Who was it that discovered the pilot's treachery?"

The man was sent for and proved to be a young sailor of splendid physique, and with the air of a man who would do and dare anything.

"Your name, sir?"

"Trenholm."

"Mr. Trenholm, Juan Mora is my first officer, Brule my second, and I make you my third; so at once go on duty as such."

The young man bowed and retired, while Ronaldo watched him closely and decided that he had selected wisely.

When Mora went forward, at the command of his chief, while Vernon Harcourt stood on the deck, watching the chase by the two frigates and sloop-of-war, he soon returned, accompanied by Trenholm and the pilot.

The latter walked between the two pirate officers. He was pale and evidently greatly scared.

His hands were ironed behind him, his ankles were manacled, but the gag had been taken from his mouth.

"Mr. Trenholm, call the men to witness the execution of a traitor, and Mr. Brule, rig up a rope with which to hang this man."

The order was given with perfect calmness, and Vernon Harcourt said sharply:

"Do you intend to murder this man, sir, in the face of three king's vessels?"

"I intend to hang him, sir, as a traitor."

"As a true man to his king, but false to a pirate, you should say."

"Do not attempt to argue, Midshipman Harcourt, or it may be a king's officer will also hang. The yard-arm will hold two."

The hint was as good as an order, for Vernon made no retort.

In the mean time the unfortunate pilot had been placed under a rope, rigged aloft, and the noose was dropped over his head.

He was white as a corpse and trembled violently, but his lips were set tight, as though to keep back the cries for mercy that were welling up from his heart, and which he knew would be worthless, addressed to the stern commander of the fugitive schooner.

The crew stood in silence, and all felt that they were being taught a lesson by their daring leader that he meant should be a warning to them.

The schooner was sailing swiftly along, bending gracefully to the stiff breeze off-shore, and the low, wooded shores of the Jersey coast were not half a league away, while over the starboard quarter rose the high hills of Navesink Highlands.

Just abreast of these highlands, and rushing on in the wake of the schooner, but nearly a league astern, was the Porcupine, while a mile further back came the sloop, and just off her port quarter was the large frigate.

The Porcupine still kept up a fire from her bow-guns, hoping to cripple the fugitive, but so far the pretty schooner had escaped unscathed.

Such was the scene that met the vision of the doomed man, and, with every face merciless but one, he gazed for sympathy upon that one—Vernon Harcourt—and though he plainly saw pity in the gaze of the midshipman, that was all, for there was nothing that he could do to save him.

As the pirate officers formed to witness the execution, the midshipman turned as though to descend into the cabin.

But Ronaldo said sternly.

"You are to witness, sir, how free sea rovers punish traitors, Midshipman Harcourt."

Vernon bowed and returned to his post at the taffrail.

"Pilot, for your treachery you are to die, and such shall be the fate of every traitor that sails under my command."

"Mr. Mora, haul down that flaunting lie from the peak, and place there the black flag of Red Hand, the Sea Recreant!" and the voice of the chief rung like a bugle.

Down fluttered the red ensign of Great Britain, and up to the peak went the black flag of the Red Hand, while at the same moment the traitor pilot was hoisted in mid-air.

At that moment a startled cry was heard, and all beheld Midshipman Harcourt spring upon the rail and leap boldly into the sea before the gaze of the astounded pirates!

CHAPTER XIX.

A BRAVE SWIMMER.

WHEN Vernon Harcourt sprang from the deck of the captured schooner Destroyer, into the sea, he had made a close calculation of his chances of escape.

He knew that the tide was flowing shoreward, and he saw that the schooner was not more than a mile and a half from the land.

Then he saw that the Porcupine was directly in the wake of the schooner, or a trifle to landward, while she was not so very far distant.

Astern of the Porcupine were the frigate and sloop-of-war.

The eyes of all must be upon the schooner,

and if he leaped into the sea he would doubtless be seen from their decks.

Once seen, he would be watched and picked up by one of the vessels certainly.

If they should pass him, then there was the shore for him to swim to.

He was a brave swimmer, and often had swum from Graystone across to Vandergilt's tavern dock without being in the least fatigued.

The pirate had told him that he intended to keep him on board as a hostage.

With this in his mind he had decided to make the attempt to escape.

He watched his opportunity, and when every eye was upon the pilot as he was swung up into the air, he leaped over the taffrail and sunk beneath the waves.

The schooner was twice her length away when he arose, and he saw that he had been discovered.

But to lay to and lower a boat would be a risk which he knew even Ronaldo the Red Hand would not take to capture him.

With strong stroke he swam the waves, while the schooner sped on, and seeing that he was not to be molested, he turned his gaze upon the Porcupine.

Hardly had he done so when there came a deafening roar, a whizzing, shrieking sound, and a cannon-ball buried itself in the wave that held him upon its crest.

Then he knew that the pirate was firing at him, determined to kill him.

So he watched the schooner now, and as a puff of smoke came from the muzzle of the stern pivot-gun, he dove deep.

The shot was well aimed, for it struck within a few feet of where he went down.

Again he rose and once more watched the flying schooner, to once more dive at the shot.

This was hard work upon him, as it necessitated his being under water half the time; but he bore it bravely, and all the while saw that the schooner was receding rapidly and firing with less precision.

He was glad to see also that had those on the Porcupine not observed his leap into the sea, the firing would attract their attention to him.

At last the schooner gave up firing at him as he became lost to view from her decks, and he turned his attention to the Porcupine, now not a mile distant.

With his uniform, shoes and cap on, he felt the strain in swimming; but he must bravely bear up, and he did so.

It was not very long before he realized that he was seen by those on the Porcupine, and the vessel began to bear toward him.

He waved his cap to attract attention more decidedly, and he heard the cheer that came to him from the crew.

Then he saw men springing into the ratlines with life-lines to throw to him, and the Porcupine changed her course so as to luff up into the wind and check her speed as she drew near to him.

He swam in a direction to aid in his being picked up, without loss of time to the vessel more than was necessary, and then watched the approach of the noble craft.

Nearer and nearer it came, and as her speed was slackened, an officer sprang into the fore shrouds and hailed:

"Ahoy, my lad, ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Stand ready to catch a line and make it fast about you so that we can draw you on board."

"Ay, ay, sir," was the cool reply, and a moment after the officer who hailed cast the line himself.

It was cleverly caught by the midshipman, and a quick turn made about his body with the end.

"All ready, sir!"

The gallant ship glided on, and as the bold swimmer swept astern he was drawn by strong hands to the deck of the Porcupine.

"Ha! a king's officer!" cried the one who had hailed, and who wore the brilliant uniform of a naval captain.

"I am Vernon Harcourt, sir, passed midshipman in the Royal Navy, and was in charge of the schooner Destroyer when she was cut out last night from her anchorage by Ronaldo, the Red Hand," and Vernon Harcourt spoke with promptness and decision in tone and manner, while he saluted the officer who had addressed him.

"Ah! do you hear that, Sir Percy?" and he turned to Sir Percy Travis, the commander of the Porcupine, and a fine-looking old gentleman of fifty, who held forth his hand to the midshipman and said:

"I congratulate you upon your escape, sir, and yours was a bold act indeed."

"Will you tell us about yonder pirate commander, and then I'll have an officer fit you out in dry clothing?"

"I can only say, sir, that I was in charge of the schooner with a brother midshipman and twenty men, and she was anchored under the guns of the frigate King's Own."

"An officer came off last night, with orders to send my second ashore for convalescent pirate prisoners at the hospital, and I did so."

"The pretended officer remained on board, and I was suddenly felled by a blow which stunned me."

"When I recovered I found myself in irons, and the schooner was floating down with the tide."

"Soon after boats came alongside, and Red Hand and his crew boarded and seized the vessel without trouble, for the men I had left with me joined the pirates."

"In the Narrows we drifted upon the frigate at anchor there with the sloop, and this morning ran upon this vessel, and Ronaldo had me freed of my irons, told me he intended to hold me as a hostage, and ordered me on deck to witness the execution of the pilot, who had tried to get the schooner retaken by running upon the frigate in the fog."

"And it is that brave fellow whom the pirate swung up awhile since?" asked Sir Percy Travis.

"It is, sir, and I took advantage of their doing so to leap overboard, intending to swim ashore if I was not picked up by you."

"You took big chances against death, my brave lad; but I will have Midshipman Carroll see to your comfort."

And the commander of the Porcupine called to a young officer near and bade him rig Vernon Harcourt out in dry attire and see that he got a good breakfast.

CHAPTER XX.

THE RETURN TO PORT.

THE Porcupine still held on after the flying schooner when Vernon Harcourt again came on deck, rigged out in the suit of Midshipman Carroll and refreshed by a swallow of grog and a good breakfast.

The frigate and the sloop, seeing that they were being dropped astern by the Destroyer and the Porcupine, had put back for port.

The Porcupine, however, had found more than a match for her speed in the fugitive schooner, which was leaving her astern at a steady pace.

Upon the deck of the fine vessel now had assembled all of her officers and crew and among the former stood a lady and a young girl.

The former was a widowed sister of Sir Percy Travis, and the latter was his daughter, a sunny-haired, beautiful little miss of fourteen.

As he had come aboard of the vessel in such a gallant manner, Sir Percy considered Midshipman Harcourt his guest, and calling him to approach, he introduced his sister and daughter, the latter holding out her hand and saying, in a frank manner that was irresistible:

"Papa has told me what a brave young middy you are, and I am glad to meet you."

"Why, there are a dozen middies on the Porcupine that would give a year's pay to do what you did, sir."

Vernon blushed, while Lord Leslie Avon said, in a low tone:

"There are a dozen middies who would risk life to have you address them as you did that handsome young gentleman, Lady Mildred."

"He deserves it," was the reply of the little beauty, and she shot a glance at Vernon Harcourt, who was talking to her aunt.

"Are you a son of Lord Ro-ser Harcourt, once a captain in the Royal Navy?" asked Lord Leslie, approaching the youth.

"Yes, my lord," and Vernon turned toward the young man who was said to be the pet of a king.

He saw that he was certainly very handsome, and more, he had the look of one to dare anything that man dare.

He had been called by many an "exquisite," a "fop," and was said to be a "ladies' man."

But withal he was a man, every bit of him, as any one could see who attempted to read his face.

"I have not the pleasure of personally knowing your father, sir, but have heard of him as a brave and dashing officer."

"I am glad I am to have you under my command."

"Thank you, sir; but the schooner cannot be taken," and Vernon Harcourt glanced toward the Destroyer, now miles away.

"True, but another vessel can be found, and it will be an honor to retake the schooner."

"By the way, Sir Percy, had we not better give up the chase and run for port, so that I can see at once about securing another vessel?"

"I think so, my lord, for fast as the Porcupine is, the schooner outfoots us rapidly."

"I fear you will find it hard work to get another craft with her speed," announced Captain Travis, and then he gave the orders to put back to port.

The wind held fair for the run back until Sandy Hook was reached, and as though to help the fine vessel still further, then veered around to the southward, so that it drove the Porcupine swiftly up the harbor.

The frigate and the sloop had already passed through the Narrows, the former dropping anchor soon after, while the latter ran on up to the city to report the result of the cruise.

"How I would like to live there," cried Lady Mildred Travis with enthusiasm, as the Porcupine sailed by Graystone Hall.

"That is my home, Lady Mildred," Vernon Trevor said with pride at the beauty of his home, while Lord Leslie, who seemed to like to tease the fair young girl, whispered:

"He cannot fail, Lady Mildred, after such a hint, to ask you to make it your home some day."

The young girl blushed but retorted:

"If he does I fear I should not have the heart to refuse, my lord."

The Porcupine was given a welcoming salute by the frigate as she passed, and half an hour after by the forts and the vessels-of-war in the port, to all of which she majestically replied, and soon after dropped anchor off the Battery, when Lord Hester Hammond and the commander of the frigate King's Own, came on board to receive the visitors.

The story of the capture of the schooner was told from their standpoint, for they had seen the young midgy sent on a fool's errand by the forged orders, and heard all, and no one who remembered the dense fog of the night before felt that blame could be visited upon any one.

"Fortunately, my lord, as you say you wish to put to sea as soon as a vessel can be obtained, a brig from Boston arrived in port to-day."

"She is a fine craft, said to be very fast, and can be pierced for guns and armed by to-morrow, if you wish," said Lord Hammond, to whom Lord Leslie Avon had expressed a wish to at once go to sea in pursuit of his fugitive vessel.

"The very thing, and I will board her at once and set to work to fit her out, for I have my own crew of four-score picked fellows with me."

"But I wish our young hero here, Midshipman Harcourt, to go with me as a junior officer."

"Mr. Harcourt can do so, my lord; but he is an officer of little experience thus far, yet one whom I can fully recommend to you," and calling Lord Avon aside the commandant of the fort held a long and earnest conversation with him, the result of which was that Vernon Harcourt accompanied the young English captain ashore and the brig was immediately secured and her crew set to work upon her to get her ready for sea as an armed cruiser.

"Will you permit me to join the vessel off my home, sir, as she puts to sea, for I would like to see my father before sailing?" asked Vernon of Lord Avon the following morning, when it was decided that the brig could be gotten ready to sail by sunset.

"Certainly, but keep a bright lookout for our coming, and come off to us, for I do not care to lose you, Harcourt," replied Lord Leslie, and half an hour after Vernon Harcourt was upon his way to Graystone in a small smack, whose skipper he had paid well to take him down to his home with all speed.

CHAPTER XXI.

LORD ROSSER'S COMMAND.

ON the way down the harbor to Graystone, Vernon Harcourt did not have the appearance of one who was a hero, for he seemed ill at ease and was very pale.

When the prisoner of the pirate Red Hand he had shown no such fear as now seemed to possess him.

The fact that he had begun his sea career with such fine prospects did not appear to cheer him in the least, and that he was already a rival of his brother for honors had no effect upon him.

He bit his lip nervously as Graystone came in sight, and he seemed to be lost in deep and painful meditation.

Was it that he dreaded his brother had grown worse, or was dead?

He had always been devotedly attached to Lionel, as the latter had been to him, and raised as they had been almost in exile, where the value of title and estate was not known to them in fact, as it would have been in England, they had held no high anticipations for the future that rank might bring to them.

It may have been to have no rivalry between them that had caused Lord Rosser Harcourt to hide from them which was the eldest, who one was the heir of the title and estates of Harcourt.

They could certainly pass as twins, so much did they resemble each other, and as to which was the older neither knew, and to look at them no one could tell.

If asked the question, they would say that they did not know, and more, they did not care.

They were "Master Lionel" and "Master Vernon" to the help on the estate, and those whom they met.

If Touton and the old butler and cook knew which was to be "my lord," they pleaded ignorance of the fact.

Thus had the two lads been reared until chance threw in their way the opportunity for Lionel to win fame by the capture of the Sea Shark and the recapture of the king's schooner.

While lying at the point of death from the wound given him by Red Hand ere he escaped from the schooner, Vernon had taken his place as it were and been given a berth in the king's

service, and chance and pluck had made him a hero also, within a very short while.

Now he was to go to sea under command of one of the king's most gallant young officers, to aid in driving the cruel Black Flag from the seas, but before sailing, he wished to return to Graystone, if but for a moment.

He must know how his brother was, and so he had asked for a leave of a few short hours, to join the brig as she passed his home on her way out to sea.

One would have thought that he would have returned home flushed with pride, to make known his adventures to his father and Touton, and to Lionel if he could bear them.

But instead, he was pale, nervous and anxious.

As the little smack ran into the cove Touton, who was walking in the grounds, came down to the dock, and he grasped the hand of the youth as he sprang ashore, while he said:

"We know all, Vernon."

"All!" gasped the youth.

"Why, lad, what ails you?"

"What do you know?" and the voice of Vernon Harcourt was almost a whisper.

"I know of the Destroyer's having been cut out, of your having been made prisoner and of your escape, for on board the Porcupine is a sailor who is the brother of our farm-hand, Josh, and the latter went up to meet him and heard the whole story of your escape from the pirate."

"Ah! and Lionel?" and as he asked the question, Vernon stepped forward to hand the skipper his pay.

"He is improving, though his escape from death has been but a close one."

"I am so glad," and Vernon gave a sigh of relief, while he added:

"I feared he was dead, and I hardly dared ask."

"But come, let us go up to the mansion, for your father will be glad to see you, and I suppose you will not remain long?"

"A few hours only, as I join the brig, that has been fitted out to replace the schooner, as she comes down the harbor."

"I did not wish to go to sea without knowing just how Lionel was."

And the manner of Vernon Harcourt changed, the color came back into his cheeks and he seemed no longer nervous and anxious.

Lord Rosser sat at one in his library, and he greeted his son with real pleasure for he had ridden over to the farm quarters and closely questioned the seamen of the Porcupine about all that had occurred.

"My son, I welcome you back as from the grave, for your escape was a narrow one, having been in the power of Red Hand, the Rover, I hear."

"Yes, father, I did make a narrow escape of it, for Ronaldo seemed very anxious to end my life."

And Vernon told Lord Rosser the story of the schooner's capture and how he had made his escape.

"It was just like you, my son; but did that wretch fire upon you after you had jumped overboard?"

"He did, sir."

"You called him Red Hand?"

"So he is known, sir."

"Describe the man."

"He is about your size, father, but younger, and does not look unlike you; but he has an expression that is cruel indeed, and he looks to me like a very devil and doubtless deserves the name given him as a sea-scurge."

"Why is he called Red Hand?"

"He has a birth-mark, sir, for his right hand to the wrist is blood-red, and there a chainlike mark encircles it, for I saw him change his gloves, for he always wears them, I heard."

"Have you ever heard of him, father?"

But Lord Rosser did not reply, for he had leant his head upon his hand, thereby concealing his face from the view of his son.

But Vernon Harcourt saw that his hand was quivering as with suppressed emotion, and he said:

"Well, father, I am safe, so do not mind it."

"And you go on a cruise after this man, this Red Hand?"

"Yes, sir; and we hope to catch him; and if it can be done Lord Leslie is the man to do it, for he is every inch a sailor and I do not wonder that he has won promotion so young."

"If we catch Red Hand, I shall ask to be the officer in charge of the execution, for his—"

"My son, you must not do so!"

"Come, pledge me your word you will have no hand in the execution of this man?" and Vernon was fairly startled by the excited manner of his father.

"I feel revengeful, father, so why should I not—"

"Do you hear, sir?"

"You are to make me the pledge not to have aught to do with the execution of Ronaldo the Red Hand, if he is taken?"

Vernon knew what his father was when angry and aroused, and he saw a look in his eyes then that he did not like or understand, and he dared not ask more.

So he said:

"Certainly, sir, I will promise what you wish, unless I am ordered to take command of the execution."

"In that case even you are to decline."

"Father!"

"I mean it, Vernon, you are to ask to be relieved of the duty."

"Why, father, what can be your motive for this request?"

"It is no request, sir, it is a command, and my motive is not for you to know."

"It is enough that I tell you my wishes, and if you disregard them, Vernon, then for what follows you have only yourself to blame."

Vernon Harcourt saw that Lord Rosser was deeply moved, and so he said:

"Well, father, I wish to please you, so I promise; but after all we are counting ahead, for it is catching before hanging, you know, sir, and Ronaldo the Red Hand will not be easily run down."

The nobleman held out his hand and grasped that of his son, and then the latter went to visit his brother.

But Touton met him at the door of the sick chamber and told him that Lionel slept and must not be disturbed.

And three hours after, when Vernon left to go off and join the brig, reported coming down the harbor, Touton told him that Lionel still slept and must not be awakened, even to bid him farewell.

"What does it mean, I wonder?" muttered Vernon, and again that look of anxiety came over his face; but he bade his father and Touton farewell, walked down to the shore and was rowed out to the brig by Josh the farm-hand, and his sailor brother from the Porcupine.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE MYSTERIOUS DON.

SOME fifteen miles from Panama, off the coast to the south, lie several islands, the largest of which is Taboga, even to-day one of the most romantic spots upon the shores of the Americas, and about which are banded down many weird legends of buccaneering days.

The island is a lovely abiding-place to-day, with its snug little harbor, its quaint village, ancient church and green hills and fertile valleys, its cliffs, caverns, tamarind trees, fruits and queer people.

At the time of which I write it was the home of a Spanish settlement, with an admixture of various other nationalities, and there were strong reasons for believing that many of these denizens were the direct descendants of Buccaneers Morgan and his men.

It was known that the famous Morgan had once made the island his lair, and many hidden pirate treasures had been found in the caverns and cliffs of Taboga, where outlaws had placed them, intending to return some day and get them.

But alas for them, that "some day" never came, and others secured their booty, blood-stained as it was, and won by cruel deeds under the black flag.

At the head of one of the valleys on Taboga still stand the ruins of an old Spanish home, which must have been at that time as strong as a fort.

It was but one story in height, but with a wall around the flat roof where a battalion could have found refuge.

There was a tower rising above, from which an extended view of the sea for leagues around in every direction could be obtained.

The "Castle," for so it was called then, occupied an acre of ground, for it had a large plaza in the center, in the middle of which was a huge spring bubbling up from the rocky floor.

There were plots of flowers in the plaza, orange, banana and tamarind trees, with here and there an avocartes* tree, and pineapples.

The lands surrounding the Castle were fertile and well cared for, and there were shady walks, quiet nooks and points of observation that were very attractive.

The dweller in this grand old home, at the time of which I write, was known as the "Spanish Don."

He was said to be the possessor of untold wealth, and men said that he was an exile from Spain.

One day a ship's crew had landed in Taboga and they had set to work building the Castle.

When finished they had set sail, going no one knew where.

Then another ship had arrived, bearing furniture for the new home, and this vessel, too, had sailed away, no one knew where, for the crew, as had that of the other ship, pretended to speak no language known to the dwellers on Taboga, or they could not do so.

A third vessel had then come, and it brought the master of the Castle, the Spanish Don, and his servants.

He was known to his servants, of whom there were but half a dozen, as Don Dolores; but more than that he came from Spain and had sought Taboga as a place of seclusion, the servants either could not, or would not, tell.

* Called in English alligator pears.—THE AUTHOR.

He was said to possess untold riches, and certainly he enjoyed the best that could be gotten for him.

Before the coming of Don Dolores, the dignity of the island had been an old Spanish noble who had sought a home there with his daughter and servants.

He had erected a comfortable dwelling just out of the village, and was a very popular man with all, from the priest in charge of the church to the most humble boatman.

This personage bore the name of Don Delos Bianca, and he had instantly stepped into popular favor by paying the priest liberally to absolve the sins of every man, woman and child on the island to date.

If his servants could tell aught about Don Delos's past, they did not do so, and so his word was accepted that he had come there to find rest away from the world, and educate his daughter, who, at the time of his arrival, was but fourteen years of age.

Padre Polo, the head priest of the little cathedral, was a man of rare learning, and had seen much of the world.

He was a *bon vivant* as well as a good priest, and he enjoyed his life upon the island, where he was looked up to by all and where his word was law.

A small corps of assistants helped him in his duties, or rather did the work for him, and only the Pope of Rome was regarded as a greater being than was Padre Polo.

Attached to his cathedral there was a small convent, where dwelt a score of good sisters, and one of these, the superior, and Padre Polo were to become the governess and tutor of Don Delos Bianca's little daughter, the pretty Senorita Camilla Bianca.

That little lady was content to study hard; but she also loved a life of freedom, and not only did she know all about the island, from having gone all over it on foot, and horseback, but she had actually sailed around it alone in her little yacht, with every conceivable craft in the harbor in chase of her for fear she would lose her life, for the young girl had, in a spirit of fun, run away from her attendants.

Don Dolores had been the first-comer of the two Spaniards to Taboga, so Don Delos Bianca had expected he would call upon him when he settled there.

But this the mysterious Don of the Castle did not do.

Padre Polo said that he had called upon Don Dolores, but more than to have come to confession now and then, he never saw him.

He described him as a man advanced in years, with long white hair and beard, but with form and step as erect and quick as a young soldier's.

He was seen riding over the island on horseback now and then, but otherwise had seldom been known to leave the Castle.

One day, when Senorita Camilla was in her seventeenth year, she, in her daring, had ridden out on a narrow reef, which at low tide was uncovered, and led out to a rocky island known as El Morro, and where still can be seen the ruins of Buccaneer Morgan's fort.

The tide, which at Taboga rises some twenty feet, came in with a rush, and Senorita Camilla tried to regain the large island in spite of the danger.

But, when she had nearly reached a point of safety, her horse lost his footing, a huge breaker tore her from her saddle, and she felt that her life would end there and then.

But suddenly a strong arm grasped her, and she saw a dark face bending over her, a face that was half-hidden by gray hair and beard.

"I will save you, senorita," he said, with an air of perfect composure, and after a fierce struggle with the rushing tide, he bore her ashore in his arms.

She knew him, for she had several times seen him in her rides, and she said:

"It is Don Dolores to whom I owe my life."

Then she fainted away.

CHAPTER XXIII.

SENIORITA CAMILLA'S PLEDGE.

WHEN the lovely young daughter of Don Delos Bianca recovered consciousness she found herself in a beautiful room and over her bent the kindly face of a woman.

She was bewildered by her surroundings, gazed about her in wonder, and then said:

"I am not at home."

"No, senorita, you are in the home of Don Dolores."

"He saved you from death, and when you fainted brought you here and bade me care for you."

"He will be happy to know that you have recovered."

"He was so brave to risk his life in that wild sea to save me, and I owe him my heart's gratitude."

"But I am all right now, so let me thank him and return to my home, as my father will be anxious."

And Camilla Bianca arose from the lounge upon which she had been lying.

She had often had a desire to be within the walls of the mysterious home of Don Dolores, and now she found herself in a room that was

even more luxuriously furnished than was any part of her own home.

Her neat riding-habit clung about her form, and her hair falling far down her back caused her to look very beautiful.

"My master will escort you to your home, senorita, for the horses are ready, if you must go," said the woman.

"Yes, I must go at once; but though I would see Don Dolores to thank him for my life, I would not have him worry to take me home."

Just then Don Dolores entered and bowed low.

He had changed his wet clothing, and Camilla could not but think him a remarkable-looking man as he stood before her.

"Senorita, I am happy in seeing you revived and well, and, though you are welcome to the hospitality of my home, I would escort you to your father's abode, as you wish to go there at once, for I overheard your words."

Senorita Camilla advanced, and seizing the hand of the Don imprinted a kiss upon it ere he could prevent, while she said, with deep emotion:

"Heaven forever bless you, señor, for the life your courage saved to me, and if ever I can prove my appreciation, my heartfelt gratitude to you, command me and I obey."

The Don fairly started at her words, and said, as he clasped her hand:

"Some day, senorita, I may ask you to keep that pledge, if so you mean it."

"I do mean it."

"As a pledge to do as I ask some day?"

"I have said it," and her face changed color slightly, though her words were firmly uttered.

"I shall not forget your pledge, lady; but most happy am I in having served you," and offering his arm in a courtly way that seemed natural to him, he led her out of the room.

They crossed the plaza, or court, where the fountain was playing, and he plucked for her a few flowers, while a servant advanced with a silver salver, which which was a decanter of wine and cups.

"Try a glass of wine to keep off the chill, lady, for you must not catch cold."

"Your health and happiness, Senorita Bianca."

She drank the wine, and they continued on to the outer door where a couple of horses awaited them.

The Don raised her to her saddle, and mounting with an ease that belied his gray hairs, placed himself by her side, and they rode down the path together which led to the home of Don Delos in the valley near the village.

Word had already gone to the Don, from a shepherd on the hill, who had seen his daughter's danger, of Camilla's rescue, and the poor man with face livid with dread, met Don Dolores and his fair charge as they approached the mansion.

With a cry of joy he clasped his daughter in his arms, and heard her quickly-told story.

Then, with tears in his eyes and a trembling voice, he grasped the hand of Don Dolores and poured out a torrent of thanks.

Don Dolores made light of his rescue, and would have said farewell; but Don Delos urged that he should at least enter his home and have a glass of wine beneath his roof.

"Yes, Don Dolores, you cannot refuse."

"You must come," said Senorita Camilla, urgently.

Thus urged, the mysterious Don, who had met no one, other than Padre Polo, since his coming to Taboga, entered the home of Don Delos, and when Camilla, half an hour after, appeared in a pretty robe and looking as fresh as a rosebud, she found her father and his guest enjoying a decanter of wine together like two old friends.

The Don at once poured her out a goblet of wine, and rising handed it to her with the low-spoken words:

"Ever to your health and happiness, fair lady, and your pledge."

In spite of herself Camilla again paled when he spoke of her pledge; but she drank the wine with the words:

"I will not forget, Don Dolores."

Then the mysterious Don arose and took his leave.

But not once did he ask Don Delos to visit him, nor did he say that he would call again.

He bade the father and daughter farewell, and mounting his pony set off for his Castle, the horse which Camilla had ridden following him.

And when the doors of his Castle closed behind him, he became as much a recluse as before, at which Don Delos and Camilla wondered greatly.

But for the life of her, Camilla Bianca could not drive the pledge she had made from her memory.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MEXICAN AVENGER.

ABOUT the time of the saving of Senorita Camilla's life by the mysterious Don, there dwelt not far back from the Gulf, upon the coast of Mexico, an old Mexican ranchero and his daughter, a lovely maiden of eighteen.

Señor Morales had been an army officer, but

having killed his superior officer in a duel about a young lady with whom both were in love, he had been dismissed from the service, and, marrying the lady in question, had gone to his ranch to live.

With the wife he so dearly loved he had lived a quiet, happy life, and two children were born to him—a son, who had early entered the coast service of Mexico as a midshipman, and a daughter who had grown to beautiful womanhood, and remained to cheer the declining years of her father, for the Señora Morales had died when Luta was twelve years of age.

The Señor Morales was not a rich man, but his ranch brought him a good living, and the beauty of his daughter Luta caused many suitors to ask for her hand.

But the maiden seemed to have a desire to remain with her father, until one night a vessel-of-war dropped anchor in a bay near the Morales ranch, to ride out a storm, and her commander was invited to become the guest of Señor Morales during his stay.

This officer Luta loved at first sight, and he certainly appeared to return that love.

From that visit of the cruiser to the little harbor, others followed, and, believing his visitor to be what he represented himself, Señor Morales was content that his daughter should become his wife.

Upon the next visit of the cruiser's commander, however, a change had come over the Mexican and his daughter, for a deserter from the alleged cruiser had reported to the fair maiden that her lover was no Spanish officer, but in fact none other than Ronaldo, the Red Hand, the Scourge of the Mexican Gulf and its adjacent waters.

Being convinced, by the proof given by the deserting sailor, Señor Morales determined to capture the famous pirate, and so he armed his peons and kept them ready for the next visit of the buccaneer.

Had the visitor gone alone to the hacienda, there is little doubt but that his days would have then and there ended; but he always ordered a body-guard to secretly follow him, and be in readiness to aid him should they be needed.

This was not known to the señor, and when he accused the visitor of his perfidy and called to his peons to aid in his capture, the pirate gave a shrill whistle, which was answered by a distant shout, and then a desperate battle was begun of one man against a dozen. The Red Hand wielded his sword with fearful effect, and his aim was deadly, so that the peons were driven back.

But Señor Morales led them on and, smarting under the insult to her of a pirate's love, the Senorita Luta rushed into the room to urge the men to capture the famous buccaneer chief.

They pressed forward just as the relief guard came to their chief's aid, and a volley of shots were fired into the room.

With a wild cry the beautiful girl sunk dead by the side of her father, who had fallen by the sword of Red Hand, and in mad terror the peons who could do so turned and fled.

Then followed a scene that showed the pirate's fury, for the hacienda was robbed of all its valuables, then set on fire, and the cattle that fed upon the plains were hunted down and shot ruthlessly.

Loaded with booty and leaving death and destruction behind, the pirate schooner set sail from the harbor, into which, several hours after there sailed the Coast Guard vessel of the Spanish colony of Mexico, on board of which Juarez Morales was a lieutenant.

The scene that met his gaze as he landed almost crazed his brain, for the bodies of his sister, father and the peons lay before him, his home was in ruins, and the plains were strewn with the cattle which had been the wealth of the Mexican ranchero.

The peons who had escaped now came and told their story, and Juarez Morales made a vow to hunt down Ronaldo the Red Hand and seek revenge for his deeds of infamy and death.

He asked permission of the Mexican Junta to have the Coast Guard vessel devoted to the service, but it was not permitted to do so, and, with the remnant of the fortune left by the pirates, he purchased a craft, armed and manned it, and started in search of the sea outlaw.

Though holding no commission as a cruiser he sailed under the flag of the Mexican Colony, and cruised about the Atlantic, then rounded the Horn into the Pacific and followed up the coast toward Panama.

One afternoon when off the coast of Panama, he saw a small trading-craft that had been dismantled, and was being driven before the gale toward the island of Taboga.

A perfect tornado was sweeping down upon the sea, and the fate of the little vessel was assured.

It could never ride out that fearful storm.

Instantly he stood toward it, and, to his surprise beheld that there were fair passengers on board.

It was the little trading-packet that ran between Panama and Taboga, and young Captain Juarez Morales was just in time to save the lives of those on board, for the wreck was settling

fast, and would have gone down under the force of the coming tornado.

Hardly had the transfer been made, when the fierce hurricane swept down upon the Mexican schooner, the wreck was engulfed, and even the larger vessel barely staggered up from under the seas that swept over her.

As it was her topmasts were carried away, her bulwarks stove and other damage done, while half a dozen of her crew were swept away to die.

But Captain Morales was a perfect seaman, a man of nerve as well, and he handled his vessel in such a masterly manner that he saved her from destruction.

It was two days before he could reach Taboga, with his crippled schooner, and yet he did not regret the time, for among those who had been passengers on board the little packet, were Don Delos Bianca and his beautiful daughter, the *Señorita Camila*.

Most thankful were they for their lives, and young Captain Morales was invited to become the Don's guest while repairs were being made to his vessel.

This invitation he did not accept, though he might as well have done so, as he was almost constantly there.

The work on his schooner was not hastened, and weeks passed away ere she was again ready for sea, and still the young captain lingered in port, and rumor had it that he loved the beautiful *Señorita Camila* and that she was not indifferent to his affection.

The young captain certainly was most popular with Don Delos Bianca, and he had quite won the heart of Padre Polo, who had also been one of the rescued passengers from the Panama packet.

So it was that love for Camilla Bianca had almost driven revenge from the heart of the young Mexican.

But this could not last always, for Juarez Morales had his whole fortune in his vessel; he had no income and nothing with which to pay his men when his little reserve in gold was gone.

He had hoped to capture the Red Hand, and by this, besides revenge, he would get vast treasure, for the pirate was said to be freighted with precious stones, gold, silver and booty.

But he had fallen in love, and the chain about him seemed stronger than all else.

So one day Juarez Morales told his love, and in return he learned that he had won the heart of the beautiful girl.

But just then there came into the port of Taboga the very vessel upon which Juarez Morales had served as a lieutenant.

She was smaller than the schooner and by no means as strong in guns and men, so that her captain wisely refrained from attempting to capture her.

But he was known to the Padre Polo, and he told the priest that the Colony of Mexico had refused to commission the war-vessel of Juarez Morales and had outlawed her commander as a pirate.

Charges were made, too, that piracies upon the high seas had been committed by Morales, and it was said that Spanish cruisers had orders to capture or sink the commissionless vessel wherever found.

With these charges against him, Juarez Morales went to see Don Delos Bianca and his daughter, to find there his late captain, Antonio La Paz, and to be driven from the house as a pirate.

"He loves her himself and means to make her hate me, so tells her I am a pirate."

"He has not the courage to attempt to seize my vessel, but I will force him to face me in a duello."

And with this muttered threat and a heart almost crushed with the motion the young Mexican captain returned to his vessel.

CHAPTER XXV.

BEFORE THE MAST.

It was several days after the sailing of Vernon Harcourt, in the brig with Lord Avon, before Lionel, the wounded youth, had a decided change for the better.

But, one morning, Touton did find him very much improved, and he hastened to make the fact known to Lord Rosser.

The fever had left the patient, the wound was far less painful, and Lionel was brighter and looked better every way.

From that moment he began to improve rapidly, and, as his wound healed, he became cheerful and gained in strength.

He was able to sit up in an easy-chair, after a week more, and he taken out upon the broad piazza to gaze out upon the scene before him, where had occurred his daring act.

The doctor soon after ceased his visits, and the patient was taken to drive about the forests and plains of Long Island, his father often accompanying.

Thus weeks passed away, and one day Lionel said at dinner:

"Father, I shall sail up to town to-morrow, and ask to be appointed in the navy."

"You will surely receive an appointment, my son, as you certainly deserve it, but it

will be hard to give you up as well as Vernon."

"Still, father, I could not be content to remain here all my days."

"I love the sea, and I have made a good start toward winning rank and fame, and I hope to make you and Touton proud of mesome day."

"I feel that you will, and Vernon has also started well. I wish we could get some news of him."

"He will have a long cruise, sir, doubtless, after that pirate, so we may not hear from him for months yet."

"But, are you well enough yet, my son, to go into service?"

"Oh, yes, father, I am wholly well, and by the time I get orders will be my old self again."

"Don't you think so, Touton?"

"Yes, Lionel, you certainly have entirely recovered; but with your father, I wish that you could remain at home," replied Touton.

"I am ambitious to win a name, and so could never be happy until I had tried at least to do so," was the reply.

"And you will do so, my word for it," Touton said, earnestly.

The next morning Lionel Harcourt set sail in the little yacht *Frolic* for New York, and Touton and Josh, the farm-hand, accompanied him.

It was with some little dread that the young man sent his name in to Lord Hammond Hunter, at the Naval Headquarters, for he felt that he was going to ask a favor of him.

Lord Hammond bade the guard admit his visitor, and he said as he entered:

"What, sir, you back again, and without Lord Avon and the brig?"

"What has occurred?"

"My lord, you mistake me evidently for Vernon Harcourt, my—"

"And your name is Harcourt?"

"Yes, sir, Lionel Harcourt, and I am the brother of Midshipman Vernon Harcourt."

"Ah! I knew not that he had a brother, and the resemblance is most striking."

"Well, Master Lionel Harcourt, what is your business with me?"

"I came, my lord, to ask of you an appointment in the Royal Navy, if you will be so good as to so honor me."

"Humph! I cannot see how I can, for there is no vacancy I can appoint you to, and we have all the youngsters we need just now."

"I thought, my lord, I might be an exception, sir, that you would be willing to give me a chance to win a name for myself."

"I do not doubt but that you would do so, from your looks, and your father is to be congratulated upon having two such splendid sons."

"But your brother got ahead of you in what he did, and I gave him an appointment, and my word for it he will be heard from."

"If you can do some daring act, as he has done, I will make an exception in your case, Master Lionel Harcourt, but now I can do nothing for you."

Lionel Harcourt turned deadly pale.

His heart seemed to come up into his throat and choke him.

To attempt to speak he dared not, and so with a low bow, he turned from the presence of Lord Hammond Hunter and left the room.

All seemed black before him, and Touton, who waited for him without, was startled as he saw his face.

"You are ill, Lionel," he cried, springing toward him.

"No, I am hurt, that is all; but it is over now."

"Lord Hammond certainly did not refuse you?"

"Yes, he said that he had appointed my brother, and that I must do something to distinguish myself, if I wished to become an officer in the Royal Navy."

"My God! can there be a mistake in all this, Lionel?"

"I do not altogether understand it, Touton; but we will not tell father more than that having given one appointment to Vernon, he cannot now appoint me."

"Remember, Touton, this is all that must be said."

"I understand, Lionel; but see, that young lady knows you."

Lionel turned to find a pair of beautiful eyes fixed upon him.

It was a young girl that he saw, and she was accompanied by a sweet-faced elderly lady.

But the girl held all the attraction for him, for never had he before seen a face so beautiful.

Yet he did not recall ever having seen her before, though both she and the elderly lady bowed to him and were evidently anxious to speak to him.

"Why, Midshipman Harcourt, I did not know of your return, and we thought you were absent on a cruise with Lord Avon."

It was the elderly lady who spoke, and she held out her hand.

Lionel flushed crimson, and raising his cap, said:

"Pardon, lady, but though my name is Harcourt, it is my brother doubtless for whom you mistake me."

"Your brother? How strangely like him you are."

"I refer to Midshipman Vernon Harcourt, who so boldly escaped from Red Hand the Rover."

"My brother, lady, and he is still absent on a cruise with Lord Avon," and bowing low Lionel passed on, though not until he had again flushed up under the words of little Lady Mildred Travis:

"His brother? Well you are just as handsome and brave-looking as he is."

"Ah, Touton, Vernon is the hero, not I," said Lionel Harcourt sadly, as the two walked together to the little yacht.

Several days after Touton arose to find the following note upon his table, and it had been left there during the night:

"DEAR TOUTON:—

"Please hand the within letter to my father, for it explains all.

"Yours,

"LIONEL."

The "within letter" was as follows:

"MY DEAR FATHER:—

"Do not condemn me because I seek to win a name and rank for myself, and begin at the bottom round of the ladder.

"I could not get an appointment in the king's service, so I determined to win one, and now leave home to go before the mast in a cruiser that will be far at sea when you receive this letter.

"I will not disgrace you, but seek to add honor to your illustrious name.

"When we meet again I hope to wear an eagle-letta won by my own courage.

"Haven bless you, Touton and my brother Vernon.

"Farewell.

"Your loving and dutiful son,

"LIONEL."

Such was the letter of the brave lad, whose daring capture of the pirate schooner had received no recompense from the hands of those in authority, and which had caused him to go as a sailor before the mast.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PIRATE AFLOAT.

WHEN Ronaldo the Red Hand heard the startled cry of Brule, his lieutenant, who saw Vernon Harcourt as he leaped into the sea, he turned and quickly learned the cause.

The body of the pilot was swinging aloft, but all eyes turned from it to the wake of the schooner, where the daring youth was expected to reappear.

The schooner was fairly flying through the waters, under all the sail that would draw, and she was leaving a foaming wake astern.

She was bending gracefully to the breeze, and the form of the pilot, a ghastly object, hung out over the waters.

But every eye was fixed astern, and a moment after the youth appeared and boldly waved his cap.

"Curse him! I will kill him!"

The Red Hand fairly hissed the words.

To attempt to go about and pick up the bold swimmer would be to bring the schooner under a broadside of the Porcupine, and if crippled, the capture of the craft, or her destruction, was certain.

To escape in his boats to the shore, the pirate realized, in case his vessel was lost, would be to have men hunt them down, and without a craft he could do nothing.

No, bold as he was, he dared not put about in the face of the Porcupine's broadside.

But he could try and destroy the brave youth, and so the order rung out:

"Clear that stern pivot gun for action, and, helmsman, bear off a point so I can get good aim."

The gun was cleared and loaded, and Ronaldo himself fired it, and the shot, it will be remembered, came uncomfortably near the head of Vernon Harcourt.

Shot after shot was fired, and when he saw that it was useless, that the prisoner had escaped him, the chief was livid with rage.

But his fury found no vent in words.

He had perfect control over himself, and his silent anger was more terrible than had he burst forth with vituperation and profanity.

That the schooner would escape, there was no doubt, for the Porcupine was out of range astern, and the other vessels had given up the chase.

When the bold swimmer was picked up by the Porcupine, Red Hand turned to Juan Mora and gave the order to lower away the body of the pilot and cast it into the sea.

This was done, and the men were then sent to quarters for a practice drill.

"What course, sir?" asked Juan Mora, as the schooner held on her way under shortened sail, for the Porcupine had at last given up the chase and put back for port.

"My destination, Mr. Mora, is the coast of Panama; but on the way we are to keep a bright watch for all vessels that carry valuable booty, for Ronaldo the Red Hand is after again, as you see," and the buccaneer chief

pointed to his flag, which floated over the decks.

It was a large, jet-black field, with a human skull in two of the corners, a pair of crossed-bones in the other two, and in the center a large red hand clasping a cutlass of gold.

The Red Hand smiled grimly as he spoke, and his face showed that he was proud of his defiance of law and the fact that he was a free rover of the sea.

By sunset the fleet schooner had left the Jersey coast out of sight, and was bowling along at a speed that delighted her officers and men.

The craft was well provisioned for a three-months' cruise, her battery of guns was perfect, her armament in the way of small-arms complete, and all of her appointments of the best.

The cabin was as luxurious in its furniture and comforts as the most fastidious pirate could wish, and Ronaldo, the Red Hand, seemed as contented and full of hope as a king's officer in command of his first vessel.

The crew had already learned to know their captain, and the few on board who had before served under him, and had been released when under the very shadow of the yard-arm, quickly told what the chief had been in the past, and this helped those who thought that perhaps he could be governed by their wishes in what was best to do.

"I tell you, mates," said an old sailor who sat on a gun forward that night, with half a hundred of the men about him within hearing of his voice; "I tell you, I have had a close call of it, and the cap'n has saved my neck."

"If he had not decided to get this craft, why I'd 'a' been strung up along with the rest of us as was prisoners."

"Jist see what he has done in a few days."

"He come into this harbor with a craft that was crippled, and would have gone to pieces in the first heavy blow."

"He got hold of this schooner in a clever way, for though Officer Brule did it, the chief's head planned it."

"Well, we got trapped, lost our schooner, then this one, and them of us 'at lived through it thought we'd have to climb the yard-arm by a rope about our necks."

"We thought the chief was dead; but he wasn't, and up he turns, their schooner was taken, and in a fog we could have cut with a knife, it were so thick, he found his way out to sea."

"A traitor, as you seen dancin' a hornpipe without no footing, run us plumb into a frigate; but we got away."

"Then we ran afoul o' another king's cruiser, and the chief's tongue saved us."

"Now we is at sea and we'll fill our pockets with gold."

"The chief has a snug hiding-place down on the coast o' Panama, and he has been using it for hiding in for years past, and he's going there now, I'm thinking, but on the way we will catch some prizes, or my name hain't Captain Ben."

"I have sailed with the chief, and I knows him, and you'll know him too, if I hain't mistaken, and you'll find him square with yer prize-money to a farthin', brave as a lion at bay, a perfect sailor, a devil in a fight, and fully deserving o' the name he bears o' Red Hand."

"And is it so, mate, that he has blood-stains on his hand that won't wash off?" asked one of the new men.

"I knows that he always wears gloves, and they do say he has kilt so many men that his right hand has turned blood-red."

"And the other officers?" asked another seaman.

"Mate Brule I knows, and he loves danger more than to eat, while he's a sailor to tie to."

"But as for the one the chief has made first luff, I don't know him."

"But he did the work to get this schooner and he deserves the place."

"From his looks I guess he is a man as will fight and won't be fooled with," answered Captain Ben.

"And the third officer?"

"Well, if he wasn't good the chief wouldn't have him, and he did do cool work when we run ag'in' the frigate."

The crew seemed to be rather pleased with the fact that their officers were men they could depend upon, for well all knew the desperate danger in the lives that they led, and that a mistake, or a faltering when nerve was needed, might bring them all to the yard-arm of a king's frigate.

And so the captured schooner held on her way over the sea, her destination the Pirates' Lair on the coast of Panama, and the stern-faced man who controlled the destinies of the armed robber craft, pacing the deck as calmly as though an honest flag floated above him, rather than the black symbol of his piracies.

CHAPTER XXVII.

RED HAND'S RETREAT.

UPON the Atlantic coast of the Isthmus of Panama, there is at a certain point a network of lagoons, which, narrow though they be, can give refuge to a vessel of considerable size.

These lagoons would hardly be noticed to one sailing close along the coast even, and yet, should a vessel enter the mouth of one, it could wind its way back into the waters of a small but deep lake, from which several entrances and exits could be found to the sea.

Some two months after the sailing of the King's cruiser, under her pirate commander and crew, from New York Harbor, a topsail schooner was gliding across the waters of the Caribbean Sea, and heading toward the shores of Panama.

A closer glance would show that it was the fugitiveschooner Destroyer, though the weather-stains of two months at sea had taken off the new look about hull, canvas and rigging.

There were shot-marks, too, in the sails here and there, and scars upon the trim hull, all of which had been neatly patched or repaired, and these proved that her run to the Caribbean had not been without adventure.

There was no flag at her peak, the air was balmy, and she glided along, under pressure of a five-knot breeze, heading toward the distant shore, for the range of mountains in the center of the Isthmus was visible from her decks.

Her crew had been thinned, too, somewhat by battle, and a few sat about nursing a wounded arm or leg.

The fact was the schooner had had a very eventful cruise of it thus far, and besides having to fight off a small English brig, she had met with resistance in several of her captures.

The result, however, had been most satisfactory to the crew, for it had taught them to regard their chief as invincible, one who bore a charmed life, and the prizes he had taken in the two months' cruise had enriched them to an extent they had not expected would be the case under a year's cruise.

Astern of the schooner half a league came a large, full-rigged ship, and that she was a prize of the pirate could not be doubted.

Still further astern, and in the ship's wake, was a brig, and she also had the appearance of being a prize.

Upon the quarter-deck of the schooner sat the chief, Red Hand.

He was smoking a Cuban-wrapped cigar and seemed to be enjoying the balmy air, for an awning was spread over his head.

Lying upon a cot near was Trenholm, the third officer, and he was just recovering from a wound, for he had lost his left arm.

Near him sat a dark-faced man who had been taken prisoner by the pirate, but who upon discovering him to be a surgeon had given him a tempting offer to serve him in that capacity.

As Señor Cortez needed money, he was not averse to amputating pirates' legs and arms, fishing out bullets and doctoring them when they were sick, so long as he could swear, if taken by a cruiser, that he was a prisoner to Red Hand and had been forced to be his surgeon.

Juan Mora held the deck as officer, and Brule was in command of the prize-ship, while Capstan Ben had been placed in charge of the brig.

Excepting these three vessels not another sail was in sight, and Chief Red Hand seemed glad to have it so.

The sun went down before the schooner in the lead reached the shore, but she still held on toward a certain point, the other vessels following in her wake.

The night was dark, but Red Hand gave no order to his helmsman to go about, and held on until it seemed the schooner must dash upon the wooded shores.

Then the order was given to take in sail, and as the schooner ceased her onward movement she was in the mouth of a lagoon.

Boats were lowered and sent ahead, and the schooner moved further into the lagoon as the ship came up, having also taken in all sail.

She too moved into the entrance of the lagoon and ten minutes after the brig followed.

But the boats were gotten out ahead, and slowly the three vessels were towed further and further up the lagoon, following its devious ways, until at last they came out into a small lake.

Here the anchors were let fall and the three vessels were at rest.

When the morning dawned the lake was seen to be several acres in size, and with a hill rising upon the further side.

There was an old wreck upon the further shore, which served as the home of some one, for several persons were seen upon its decks.

The trees around the lagoon rose to a height that hid the masts of the vessels, when the topmasts were sent down, and the shores of the lake were hard and not swampy as might have been expected.

Upon the hill were seen several rude cabins, and a score of people were now visible watching the vessels.

This was the lair of the pirates, and the people there were those who remained constantly in the hiding-place.

While the schooner was hauled close inshore, the ship and brig were anchored out in the lake, and springing into a boat Red Hand visited each.

Then he returned to the schooner and called Juan Mora into his cabin.

"Mr Mora, you have served me well and I have every confidence in you, so I will now leave you in command of the little fleet."

"The ship is to remain here as a store vessel, and you are to overhaul her cargo thoroughly, select all that is valuable on board and place it on the brig, as soon as the latter vessel is put in perfect condition."

"Then officer Trenholm, who will be well enough in a week or so, will take command of her, with a small crew, and sail to Havana, there to dispose of the cargo to my agent at that place."

"When the brig is gone, you are to set to work upon the schooner and put her in perfect trim once more, making the changes which we spoke of."

"Do you understand, Mr. Mora?"

"I do, sir."

"I am going across the Isthmus to Panama City, to dispose of the jewels, gold-dust and other small treasures we have, and I may be absent a month, or more; but I will return in time to take the schooner upon another cruise when she is ready to go, and the brig has returned."

"I will also come back from Colon, by sea, bringing with me more men for my crew."

"Now, Mr. Mora, I will pack up my treasures and be off."

Half an hour after Red Hand was rowed ashore, carrying with him two tightly-packed bales of treasure, which consisted of pirate booty in the shape of gold-dust, jewelry and gems.

A dark-visaged man, evidently a native of the country, met him at the shore, and shouldering the bales, led the way up the hillside to one of the cabins.

"No one has been here since I left, Parna?" he asked.

"No one, señor."

"Your mules are ready for the road, Parna?"

"Yes, señor."

"Then put the saddles upon them at once, and I will be off."

The man deposited the bales by the cabin and walked away, while a woman advanced with a stone bottle containing wine, and said:

"Will you refresh yourself, Señor Chief?"

"Yes, good Numa, for well I know the worth of your wine, and you can put me up some to last me on my journey, with some of your bread and a roast water-fowl, which will be acceptable."

"I have all ready, Señor Chief, for Parna, my husband, told me that you would doubtless take the road as soon as you came."

"And I'll bring you back gay frocks, good Numa, from Panama, and here is gold for you."

He thrust into her hand as he spoke, several onzas of Spanish gold, and she bent low with thanks, while her eyes sparkled with delight.

She was a handsome woman, and her attire was most gorgeous, as was also that of her wild-looking husband, Parna.

The latter now arrived with two small mules, and upon one was a saddle such as Spanish gentlemen rode in those days, and the other bore a pack, to which the two bales of booty were made fast and then covered over to look like baggage.

The woman then brought a priest's robe and hat, and donning them over his own suit, Red Hand mounted the mule saddled for him, and with the pack-animal following, rode away by a narrow path into the dense forest on his way over the mountains to Panama City.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LIEUTENANT CARLOS'S MISSION.

THE touching of the Spanish cruiser at the island of Taboga had certainly broken up the love affair of Juarez Morales.

His old captain had never liked him, for he had been envious of his good looks and rapid rise in rank, and he was glad to have gotten rid of him at the time that Juarez Morales had gone upon his own account to hunt down Red Hand and avenge himself for the murder of his father and sister.

Then, too, Captain La Paz was a Spaniard and hated Mexicans.

He had also fallen in love with Luta Morales and been politely refused by her when he had offered her his heart and hand.

The captain therefore had been very glad to avenge himself upon the brother for the refusal of the sister, and when he found him at Taboga with his vessel he was only too willing to make it known that he was sailing without orders and had been proclaimed an outlaw by the Junta that ruled Mexico in the name of Spain.

His vessel had been long serving as a Coast Guard upon the Gulf shores of Mexico, but had been ordered around to the Gulf of Panama, and the finding of Juarez Morales at Taboga had been a balm to his feelings for having to go so far from his home, which was at Vera Cruz.

The young captain of a flagless cruiser, for the Colony of Mexico had outlawed him, returned to his vessel in no pleasant mood after having been denounced as a pirate by Captain La Paz.

He knew well the character of his former cap-

tain, that he was cruel, a gambler and a fortune-hunter.

He knew that he had killed a number of men in duels, over a game of cards and about women.

He had sought to win his sister, Luta Morales, because he would be sure to win Señorita Camilla Bianca if he could, by foul means if not by fair.

That he was a dangerous man to meet Juarez Morales did not care.

He had destroyed his prospects with Camilla and the Don, for they could but believe the Spaniard, and he would punish him or lose his life in the attempt to do so.

Returning to his vessel he sent for his first lieutenant to come to his cabin.

"Señor Carlos, I know that you are aware of why I came to Taboga, and the cause of my long stay."

"You are aware also of the motives which caused me to put to sea to hunt down Ronaldo, the Red Hand, and you can vouch for it that no lawless act has been committed by me or my men since we put to sea."

"I can, señor."

"Now, Señor Carlos, you know that Captain Antonio La Paz has come into this port?"

"Yes, señor, his vessel lies yonder a cable's length away."

"He was ordered to this coast by the Government, and he found me here."

"I was a happy man, Carlos, for I had won the love of the beautiful daughter of Don Delos Bianca, whom you have met."

"You are to be congratulated, Señor Captain, for the lady is all that is lovely."

"Alas! Carlos, I need your sympathy, your friendship."

"You shall have it, señor."

"You do not know that in Padre Polo Captain La Paz met an old friend, and he made known to him that this vessel was outlawed, that she carried no flag with the right to do so, and that I held no commission under Spain or the Mexican Junta."

"Señor, it is like the man."

"Yes; but he said worse, for he stated that I had been guilty of piracies upon the high seas, that I had boarded and robbed vessels of Spain and other nations in the Gulf of Mexico, the Caribbean and the Atlantic."

"Ha! did he dare do this, señor?"

"Yes, and more, for he went with Padre Polo to Don Delos and told him all; yes, and to the fair Señorita Camilla he made the same fearful charges against me."

"He is a hound, señor."

"He has destroyed me in their eyes, Carlos, and I intend to prove to them that I am willing to risk my life in defense of my honor, to face even the renowned duelist, Antonio La Paz, in the *duello*."

"But, señor, he is a deadly foe, and no man has ever faced him and lived."

"Be it so; I will face him and die, and then you can tell how false are his charges against me."

"If I fall, good Carlos, I leave to you and my crew my vessel and all it contains, and its sale will repay you for your services to me."

"Now, Carlos, watch when Captain La Paz goes off to his vessel and then do you board his craft and carry to him a challenge from me, to meet me in deadly combat."

"But, Señor Captain, can I not see Padre Polo, the Don and the señorita, and tell them that these charges are false?"

"Yes, I will take the whole crew with me."

"It will do no good, Carlos, and I must meet him, so do you obey me as an officer if you will not go as my friend."

"I will go as your friend, señor, and may Heaven protect you when you face that man, for he will meet you only too gladly."

"And may Heaven have mercy upon him, for I will be merciless," sternly replied Juarez Morales.

Ten minutes after Lieutenant Carlos saw Captain La Paz go out to his vessel, and at once he entered a boat and was put on board the Mexican schooner.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE TERMS OF THE DUELLO.

CAPTAIN ANTONIO LA PAZ sat in his cabin with a look of triumph upon his face, for he felt that he had driven Juarez Morales to the wall.

He had really been envious of his young lieutenant from the first.

He had hated him because he was a Mexican, and had been given a commission in the Colonial Mexico of Spain.

Then the young Mexican had shown such courage on several occasions as to get honorable mention, where his captain had not done so.

This had increased the feeling of bitterness against him.

Next, Captain La Paz had met Luta Morales, and had loved her—for her money, as well as her beauty, and when she had refused him it had not helped the dislike he bore her brother.

Then too Captain La Paz was not a handsome

man, and Juarez Morales was, and this made the Spaniard's bitterness the greater.

When he found his Mexican lieutenant at Taboga, in command of a fine schooner, well armed and manned, and the prospect that he would make the beautiful heiress, Camilla Bianca, his wife, Captain La Paz was enraged beyond all bounds, and so had made the charges of piracy against him.

So, having broken up Juarez Morales in that quarter, he was contented and triumphant, and meant to win the beauty and heiress himself, for his coffers held but little gold, and he owed so many debts in Mexico, that it was pleasanter for him to keep at sea.

"A gentleman to see you, Señor Captain," said an officer entering the cabin, where Captain La Paz sat enjoying a decanter of wine.

"Who is he?" and the Spaniard wondered if any one of his creditors happened to be in Taboga.

"He wears the uniform of an officer, sir."

"Ah! not Morales?"

"No, sir."

"Admit him."

And the next moment Lieutenant Carlos entered.

Captain La Paz had never met him, for he had been taken from the merchantmarine of Mexico to serve Morales.

"Well, señor, how can I serve you?"

"I come, Captain La Paz, from my friend Captain Juarez Morales."

"Ah! Captain Morales?"

"I know of no such person."

"He was a lieutenant in the Colonial Navy of Mexico, under your command, señor, and his name is Juarez Morales, now captain of a vessel bound upon a voyage of revenge upon his foes."

"Ah, yes, you refer to the pirate Juarez Morales?"

"Your remark brings me in as a pirate also, señor, for I serve under Captain Morales, but this is not my time to quarrel with you, so I pass it by, for the present."

"In the name of Captain Juarez Morales I come to challenge you for having traduced his character and cast infamy upon him."

"He was kind enough to believe that you were not a coward and would meet him."

Captain La Paz saw that he had no ordinary personage to deal with.

The one who brought the challenge was equal to the situation.

His face became livid with rage, and he sprung to his feet and said:

"I have cause of quarrel with you, sir, for that man sent me no such word."

"Then I am to understand that you are a coward, and will not meet my friend?"

"I will meet him, sir, yes; but upon one condition."

"Name it, please."

"That I meet you first, and that he acts as your second."

"Then I will meet him on the same field after I have killed you."

"I will be on the Morro at sunrise in the morning, and will have my second with me, our weapons rapiers."

"I will expect to find you there, with Juarez Morales, and a second for him, as you will not be alive to serve him, and my advice is to bring your surgeon along also."

"Such, sir, are my terms, and only on such terms will I meet you and your pirate captain."

Lieutenant Carlos bowed and retired from the cabin, and soon after was on board of his own vessel.

He told Juarez Morales exactly what had occurred, and said:

"I am not sorry, Señor Captain, to have it so, for I am considered one of the best swordsmen in Mexico, and hope to kill him."

In vain did Juarez Morales argue the matter, that he should be first, for Carlos convinced him that Captain La Paz would agree to no other terms, and it was only by killing him, Carlos, that the Spaniard hoped to unnerve his real enemy and better him in the duel.

So back to the cruiser went Señor Carlos, and he said pleasantly, as he was admitted to the cabin:

"Captain La Paz, we accept your terms, sir."

"At the Morro at sunrise, rapiers the weapons, and only three to be allowed in each party."

"Good-night, señor."

"Will you not have a glass of wine, señor," said La Paz.

"Thank you, yes."

"I drink to our next meeting, and long life and happiness to the survivor."

Captain La Paz laughed, drank his wine and bowed an *adios* to the young Mexican, who at once returned to his own vessel, and began preparations for the meeting in the morning.

The scene chosen for the duel was the island where Senorita Bianca had so nearly lost her life.

There were the ruins of an old fort there, built by buccaneers in the long ago, and it was the very spot where a duel should be fought.

At sunrise the tide would be in, and so they would go to the Morro in boats.

This having been arranged the two friends retired to rest, telling the officer on duty to call them before dawn.

They were up in good time, and a cup of black coffee with the juice of a lime squeezed into it, served to steady their nerves for the coming encounter.

The second officer of the schooner, and who also acted as surgeon, went along, and the boat, with four oarsmen and a coxswain pulled away in the gray light of dawn.

El Morro was reached, just as a boat containing Captain La Paz and his second was seen approaching.

His second was seen to be none other than Don Delos Bianca, and the two oarsmen were boatmen from the little port.

Carlos bit his lips as he saw Don Delos, but Juarez Morales said:

"I am glad he is his second, for he will understand all without having to be told."

A few moments after the boat touched the shore, and Captain Antonio La Paz and Don Delos advanced to the old fort, where Captain Morales with Carlos and the surgeon awaited them.

CHAPTER XX.

THE CONFIDENTIAL CLERK.

THE home of Esther Laurie, the beautiful daughter of the man whose intimates called him Larry, the landlord of the Beacon Inn, was luxurious in the extreme.

The truth was, as the reader has been informed, Larry led a dual life.

He may, in fact, be said to have led a treble life, for he was looked upon as an honest keeper of an inn, by those who knew him only as such, while in secret he was the agent for the disposal of pirate booty and smuggled goods.

This latter business however was carried on away from his tavern, where he had a shop, which tumble down in appearance though it was, certainly did an enormous trade—*secretly*.

Then Larry, as Captain Lawrence Laurie, a retired sea captain of wealth, lived on a street back of where his inn was located, and dwelt in a comfortable house which no one would have suspected was connected with the Beacon Inn by a secret corridor.

The bluff, red-faced tavern-keeper, wearing clothes padded out to make him appear one-third again his size, and with a wig of reddish hair, and a blue scar across his cheek, would never have been mistaken for the slender, sleek-looking gentleman, well dressed in black, with spectacles, black hair and no scar upon his face, who was known as Captain Lawrence Laurie.

The truth was, Larry was a splendid hand to "make up," and when he appeared, as sometimes he had to do, in his "shop," when his clerk could not transact all business, he had one eye closed, a heavy beard, and was so completely disguised that a king's Secret Service man could not have told who he was.

Ronaldo the Red Hand had sent many a dollar into Larry's hands, and so he had been received in confidence at the inn, as has been seen.

Juan Mora had saved Larry's life and money one night, and he, too, held his secret, for the young Mexican had been in hard luck when he had rescued the landlord of the Beacon, and had become his confidential ally in many ways.

His daughter, Esther, Larry had kept aloof from all his secret life as much as it lay in his power to do.

She was known as the daughter of Captain Lawrence Laurie, the retired sea-captain of wealth; but she knew that her father was also the landlord of the Beacon Inn, though she had never suspected that he was a trader in pirate spoils, and his explanation to her about his being the proprietor of the inn, because he was a *Secret Service officer of the king*, was sufficient.

Esther Laurie was indeed a lovely girl, and she moved in good society when she chose to do so.

Her father had had her well educated, and she had many suitors who loved her as well for her beauty as for the riches that were supposed to be hers.

In his household Captain Laurie kept three servants, a cook, a combined house-servant and maid for his daughter, and a man acting in the capacity of butler and valet for himself.

If this trio of domestics knew aught of the affairs of their master, not even Esther suspected it.

The home of the supposed sea-captain was a model of luxury and beauty.

There was an air of refinement and comfort over all, and the three servants moved like clockwork and were treasures.

His dinners Captain Laurie always had with his daughter, and often there were guests present; but his breakfasts, as Landlord Larry, he ate in the inn when he pleased.

Esther had her carriage and riding horse when she wished, with a man from the stable to drive or attend her.

She had ample money for shopping purposes, and she had friends to help her pass away the time, so that she was not unhappy.

It has been hinted that she had met Juan Mora, and that the fact was not known to her father.

The Red Hand made this discovery and wondered at it; but he had not betrayed the secret, nor had he spoken to the young Mexican upon the subject.

The meeting of the two had been a strange one, and Juan Mora had rendered a service which Esther could not readily forget.

The "confidential clerk" in the shop of

"LAWRENCE & Co.,

"Ship Chandlers and General Traders in all Merchandise,"

as the sign of the landlord read over his store door, was an Englishman of whom nothing was known, even to his employer.

He had applied for work one day, had served his employer well, spoke and wrote a dozen languages, and soon proved himself invaluable to Larry.

The result was that he got to be confidential clerk and manager of the shop for the purchase of piratical and smuggled goods and the disposal of the same.

But Henry Hawthorn was furthering his own ends while serving his employer.

He had one night confessed to Juan Mora that he was the younger son of an English nobleman, but had been forced to fly on account of some charges against him of an unpleasant nature.

He, however, did not mention what those charges were.

He had been a spy upon his employer, and had cleverly traced him out in his treble life.

He knew Larry as landlord, retired sea-captain and shopkeeper, and more, as the father of Esther Laurie.

So he determined to win the maiden, and in doing so get all of old Larry's wealth.

With the example of Landlord Larry before him, he determined to lead a dual life.

So he wrote himself letters of introduction to some of the dignitaries in New York, secured quarters in a fashionable part of the town, and, as a relative of a distinguished English earl and a gentleman of wealth, bearing the name of Henry Rapier, he shaved off his beard and appeared in society.

In the dingy, gloomy little room, where once or twice a week Larry, as Lawrence & Co., met his clerk, he was unable to discover that he wore a false beard in the place of the real one he had cut off, and never once suspected that Henry Hawthorn could be the alleged gentleman, Henry Rapier, whom he had twice met at his private home.

In due time did Henry Rapier declare his love for Esther Laurie, and it was promptly refused, and in a manner that left no doubt as to her ever changing her mind.

Enraged at her for her refusal, Henry Hawthorn laid a plot to kidnap her and thus force her into a marriage with him, and, holding the secret he did over Larry, he could do nothing but accept the situation.

In this affair he needed aid, and he selected Juan Mora as his ally.

The Mexican was angry at having been suspected of being a villain; but he pretended to hate old Larry, and entered into the plot fully with the plotter.

It was arranged that when Esther next took her horseback ride Juan Mora was to go as her attendant, sent from the stable.

To do this he would pay the stable attendant liberally, and he could make an excuse to Esther that he was sent in his stead, and as she did not know him all would be well.

Esther almost invariably rode by the old stage post-road to Boston, but would branch off at a turn that led her to a pretty spot on the East River, where she could obtain a fine view of the rocky shores of Manhattan Island, the islands, the distant shores of Long Island, and the foaming waters of Hell Gate below her.

There were fine farms scattered about then, where now Central Park stands, and the city is solidly built up to the East River.

Upon reaching the river-bank Juan Mora was to seize the maiden's horse, and Henry Hawthorn whose boat was near, was to appear upon the scene, and Esther Laurie was to be captured.

Such was the bold plot of the plotter to avenge himself upon a young girl for refusing his love, and to get possession, through a forced marriage with her, of Landlord Larry's vast wealth.

CHAPTER XXXI.

TRUE TO A FRIEND.

THE plot of Henry Hawthorn opened well, inasmuch as Juan Mora was accepted, in place of the regular attendant of Esther Laurie in her ride on horseback.

She saw a handsome young man, but one most respectful, and he spoke English with just the slightest accent that made it attractive.

"I am sorry Moore is sick, but you are satisfactory to supply his place," she said, as she mounted.

She rode rapidly, went out Broadway, and ridden far out of town, to where Fifty-ninth

street now is, when she turned into a shaded lane which led across to the Harlem Road.

Crossing the Harlem highway, she went on by a lane between two farms, down toward her favorite point of observation upon East River.

To her surprise there her escort rode up alongside of her, as they entered a thick grove of trees.

"Pardon me, lady, but I wish to make known to you a secret that concerns your safety."

"Will you listen to me?"

She looked surprised, but answered:

"Certainly, Juan."

"Lady, I am not what I seem, a stable-boy, but a clerk in your father's employ."

"I am here to save you from the toils of a villain, one whom your father trusts wholly, for he is his confidential clerk."

"His confidential clerk."

"Who can he be?" asked Esther, in amazement.

"He is known as Henry Hawthorn, and he is the manager of your father's store."

"But my father has no store."

"He is interested in one, Miss Laurie, and this man is his confidential clerk."

"I was so fortunate as to save your father's life, and he gave me a place with him, for I was poor, without friends here, and a stranger in a strange land, and, though I had been a sailor, I was glad to remain here for the present."

"What there was in my face to cause Henry Hawthorn to take me for a villain, I do not know; but he did so, confided his plot to me, and I promised to serve him, but my intention was to serve you."

"But what plot can he have against me?"

"I will tell you, Miss Laurie."

"I do not even know the man."

"Not as Henry Hawthorn, true, but as Henry Rapier, a pretended English gentleman, you do."

"Ah! that hateful man?"

"Yes, for he planned to make you his wife, and to get your father's wealth."

"To do this he forged letters of introduction for himself, got rooms, pretended to have just come over from England, and, pardon me, lady, addressed you."

"He was refused, became revengeful and determined to kidnap you and force you to become his wife."

"Oh, what a wretch!"

"He is worse, lady; but he asked me to be his ally, offered me a large sum, and I consented and came with you this afternoon, giving your attendant some medicine that made him ill and taking his place."

"Now over on the river Henry Hawthorn awaits us."

"He has a small sloop at anchor, and he intended to take you to a priest he has engaged and waiting, to marry you."

"I have told you his plot, so I wish to make mine known, for he is a dangerous man and must not escape, as, in truth, he might give your father much trouble, and cause you much sorrow."

"If he attacks you, I will come to your rescue, and you ride away and leave me to deal with him."

"That is all."

"But—"

"Be guided by me in this matter, Miss Laurie, I beg of you, for this man thwarted, and alive, can ruin your father."

"I believe you to be my friend, and the friend of my father."

"There is some mystery in all this; but I will yield and do as you ask," and Esther held forth her hand and grasped that of the young man.

Then they rode on together toward the East River.

Esther went directly toward her favorite point of observation and halted.

A sloop with two men on board lay at anchor a cable's length off-shore and a boat with no one in it was made fast to the bank.

Just then a man stepped out from behind a thicket as Juan Mora dismounted and stepped to the side of Esther's horse.

With a bound the man sprang to the side of Esther's horse and seized the bridle, while he cried:

"You are my prisoner, Miss Laurie, and resistance is useless."

"For the lady, yes, but not for me."

"Hands off, Henry Hawthorn!" cried Juan Mora. "Ha, traitor! take that!"

He had drawn a pistol and attempted to fire, but Juan Mora was the quickest, and the man staggered back and fell at his shot, a red wound on his forehead showing where the bullet had hit.

Springing upon his horse Juan Mora dashed away by the side of Esther Laurie, who was white and trembling at what had occurred.

"Miss Laurie, be good enough to say, please, that you were attacked and that your attendant saved you by shooting your assailant."

"Let it be supposed that your regular attendant was the one, and if your father wishes to reward him let him do so; but do not speak of me or allow your father to know that I was with you or have ever met you."

"He will miss his confidential clerk and suppose he has run off, and that will be all, and Mr. Henry Rapier will mysteriously disappear from New York, that will be all."

"Those men on the sloop, see, have come ashore for the body, so there need be little publicity about the affair."

"And you?"

"How mean you?"

"Will you not allow me to prove my appreciation in some way of what I owe to you?"

"No; for I was born a gentleman, and can take no reward while I am already drawing good pay in your father's service."

"You are a strange man."

"Some day I hope to meet you under different circumstances; but now it must not be known that I served you or ever knew you."

"And you say my father has a shop?"

"I supposed you knew that, Miss Laurie, or I should not have spoken of it."

"No, I fear I know very little of my father's affairs; but I will do as you ask me, for it is little enough."

And Esther kept her word to Juan Mora.

But she determined to find out all that she could about her mysterious preserver, in whom she had become deeply interested.

The adventure she had met with created an excitement, naturally, and officers went to the scene.

A blood-stain on the ground showed where Henry Hawthorn had fallen, but his body was gone, and the sloop could not be traced.

Captain Laurie paid the stableman handsomely for having protected his daughter, and he was willing enough to hold his tongue and keep the reward, at the same time passing as a hero.

And it was this act of Juan Mora that had caused the interest felt in the young Mexican by Esther Laurie, in which she had asked Red Hand regarding him.

She had ferreted out about Juan Mora more than he had suspected, and had done so in a quiet way which he had never dreamed of.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE DUEL ON THE ISLAND.

THE scene of my story is shifted, and again the island of Taboga appears.

It is early morning, the horizon of the sea just becoming rosy under the approaching sun, and the scene is in the old ruined pirate fort on El Morro Island.

There a group of five persons are gathered, and upon the shore are two boats in which are oarsmen.

Four of the five men that comprise the group are in naval uniform.

One is in the dress of a civilian.

The reader has already recognized them as Captain La Paz and his second, Don Delos Bianca, and Captain Juarez Morales with the two officers who had accompanied him from his vessel.

The Don carries a couple of handsome rapiers, and the surgeon of Juan Morales's schooner also has two gold-mounted swords in his hand.

"I would respectfully ask, through Don Delos, that my affair with Captain La Paz be the first settled," said Juarez Morales, addressing Don Delos Bianca.

Don Delos turned to Captain La Paz, who had heard the words of his enemy, and the Spaniard replied:

"The gentlemen know my terms, and I will have no other."

Juarez Morales bowed in silence and stepped up to Don Delos to arrange the meeting between Carlos and the Spaniard.

"I suppose, Don Delos, that you understand the position I occupy in this meeting?" said Juarez Morales.

"As the second of the Señor Carlos?"

"Yes, now; but as Captain La Paz defamed me I sent Señor Carlos to make him face me and maintain his words."

"He took umbrage at Señor Carlos's words and would only grant me a meeting after he had met him, and we were forced to yield."

"Then, if Carlos does not kill him, I shall do so if in my power."

"Your doing so will not remove the stain from you of piracy, señor."

"It will prove that I risk my life against the most famous duelist under the Spanish flag to defend my good name."

"True; but let us arrange for this first meeting."

"Here are our swords, and I see that you have a pair."

Juarez Morales bit his lips, but simply selected a weapon, and the two duelists were placed.

Carlos looked confident, and Captain La Paz had an ugly light in his eyes.

The two men crossed swords, and then the combat was fairly begun.

Carlos was an expert swordsman, he proved that, but the man before him appeared to be a very demon with a blade, and he drove his sword to the very hilt in the body of the young Mexican.

A groan came from the lips of Carlos, and he sank to the earth a dead man.

"I will take his weapon," calmly said Juarez Morales to his surgeon, who now stepped forward to act as his second.

Don Delos's face had turned white at the death of Señor Carlos; but he stepped forward and calmly arranged with the surgeon the preliminaries for the second meeting.

Captain La Paz was unmoved.

He had witnessed too many such scenes, yes, been the principal therein, to show emotion.

As for Juarez Morales, he, too, showed no emotion, other than a burning look in his eyes.

In spite of the fate of his friend, he did not cower in the least before his former captain.

Then the two men took their stands, with the dead body of poor Carlos before their eyes.

Juarez Morales held the very weapon which Carlos had fought with, while Captain La Paz was to fight with his deadly blade, the stain of the Mexican's life-blood still upon it.

He seemed to take great pleasure in flaunting it before the eyes of his adversary.

Then the blades crossed with a savage click.

But from the very start the fierce onslaught of Juarez Morales forced the Spaniard back.

He fought desperately hard to rally, but the Mexican's blood was up, revenge was in his eyes, and his muscles were firm as steel.

He allowed the Spaniard no chance to rally, no time to attack, only forced him to defend himself.

Back he drove him, step by step, and he smiled as he saw the face of the captain grow pallid.

Back, still further, until a warning cry from Don Delos told Captain La Paz that he could retreat no further.

A ditch was behind him.

But, seeing his advantage, and with every feeling of hatred in him aroused, Juarez Morales pressed his foe still harder, and striking down the guard of the Spaniard, with a quick, strong lunge sent his blade deep into the body of his enemy.

A wild cry of rage, pain and despair mingled, broke from the lips of Captain La Paz as he sunk in his tracks, while the face of Juarez Morales fairly glowed with triumph, as he withdrew his sword and turned away.

But just then a man came rushing up to him.

It was one of the sailors from his schooner, and he was dripping wet.

"Señor Captain, the cowards on your vessel surrendered to the officer left in command of the cruiser, under promise that they would not be hanged as pirates.

"I sprung into the sea and came to warn you.

"Come with me, for I know this island well, and will find you a hiding-place.

"Come, señor, there is no time to lose."

Juarez Morales was now white with rage.

His vessel was lost to him, and he knew that he would be hanged as a pirate if taken.

La Paz was not dead, and might not die, though his wound was a dangerous one.

He could but follow the advice of the faithful sailor.

He would live for revenge.

"Come, señor, we must go, for Leon here brings me bad news; our ship has been seized, for that man was treacherous to me," and he pointed to La Paz.

But the surgeon was like a rat.

He would desert a sinking ship, so he could not go with his captain.

"If I leave the captain, señor, he will die.

"I alone can save him," he said, in a voice meant to be heard by the Spaniard.

"Remain and you shall be surgeon of my vessel," groaned Captain La Paz.

With an oath and bitter malediction, Juarez Morales turned away, saying quietly:

"Come, my faithful Leon."

Together they left the spot, and there was but one way to go.

That was to cross the reef, over which the tide was a couple of feet deep, and reach the main island, gain the hills and take refuge in one of the caverns upon the southwest cliffs.

So away they went, leaving Don Delos and the traitor surgeon with Captain La Paz and the body of poor Carlos.

The Don called the men from the boats, told the crew of Juarez Morales the situation, and they wisely submitted to the existing circumstances, and aided to carry the Spanish captain to their boat, when, with all speed they rowed back to the cruiser, and were followed by the shore skiff in which Captain La Paz and Don Delos had gone to the Morro to fight the duel which had ended so strangely.

Leon, the sailor who had proven true to Juarez Morales, had once dwelt on the island, in fact, he had been born there, and as a boy he had roamed over every foot of its hills, valleys and cliffs.

So, after crossing from the Morro to Taboga, he led the way around the house of Don Dolores and gained the cliffs, where a secret cave was found as a hiding-place.

Thus did Juarez Morales find himself without a vessel, and a fugitive from the fury of Captain La Paz, with the certainty if he was taken that he would be hanged as a pirate.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MYSTERIOUS SLOOP.

PERHAPS it was because Captain La Paz was hovering between life and death, and maybe that he felt absolutely sure of his game, that a search of the island was not made the day of the duel, to unearth the hiding-place of Juarez Morales.

The surgeon who had deserted Morales for Captain La Paz had said that the chances were in favor of the Spaniard, if well cared for, and Don Delos had taken him to his home.

It was true that the schooner of Morales had been taken, for, after the departure of the party for the scene of the duel, only a junior officer was left on the vessel, and the lieutenant commanding the cruiser had rowed on board, frightened him with a story about his captain having been killed, and told him if he would surrender his vessel and crew they would not be treated as pirates.

This the young officer did, Leon quietly slipping into the sea and swimming ashore to warn Juarez Morales of his danger, for no mercy would be shown to him, it was said, if he escaped in his duel with La Paz, which was doubtful.

The next day it was thought, after the crew of the schooner had been divided up, would be time enough for the search to be made for Morales and the sailor.

There was but one way of reaching the island, and few vessels visited the port, so that escape was impossible with the harbor properly guarded.

This was promptly done, and every craft at anchor then was told not to leave port or allow a boat even to depart from the harbor.

Night came on and the fugitives still remained in their hiding-place.

Just at sunset from the cavern they had seen a tiny sail upon the waters.

It seemed to be coming toward Taboga; but yet they could find no hope in it for them.

Leon asserted that he would go, just before dawn, to the home of a kinsman who dwelt in the village and get food, and that there was a cavern near the water which they could reach by swimming and which he believed no one knew the existence of other than himself and several of his old boy playmates, who were then absent from the island.

"We can go there and remain until the fuss blows over and then my kinsman, who is a fisherman, can go out some night with a sail-skiff, as though to fish, and run around here and let us have his boat.

"He can return overland, while we head for Panama, señor, so after all we will escape the wolves," explained Leon.

About midnight Leon determined to start for the village.

He had often served his kinsman, and he knew he would help him.

He would get food to last them some days, some sailor suits, and something in the way of bedding, for sleeping on the hard rocks was not pleasant.

"Señor, come here," he said, as he went to the entrance to the cavern.

Juarez Morales obeyed, and he saw a vessel slowly coming in toward the cliff.

"What is it, Leon?"

"I don't understand her coming in here, señor."

"Nor I."

"See, she has only her jib partially set and comes very slowly."

"Yes; and appears about to anchor."

The craft was a small one, hardly over ten tons, and was sloop-rigged.

It was without doubt the sail seen from the cavern that afternoon before sunset.

What had brought her there, to that wild coast neither Morales nor Leon could comprehend.

Soon, when within a cable's-length of the cliff an anchor was noiselessly lowered into the water and the headway of the vessel was stopped.

Then a small boat was lowered from the deck, and a moment after it came toward the cliff.

"There are three men in it, señor."

"Yes; but they are coming straight toward us."

"Yes, señor."

As Leon spoke suddenly a dark object passed down past the entrance to the cabin.

It did not quite touch the water, and as they shrunk back into the cavern they could see that it was something like a large box hung at the end of a rope.

Straight toward this came the boat, and as it came alongside a man stepped into the suspended box.

Then there was heard a low whistle, and the box moved upward out of sight.

The boat still remained, and soon the box was lowered again.

Then a large bundle was placed in it by the men in the boat, and up again it went.

Again it was lowered and another package, evidently quite heavy, was sent upward out of sight.

One of the men then threw a small anchor off into the entrance of the cavern, and when the

box was again lowered, the two stepped into it and were drawn upward.

"Well?" said Leon in surprise.

"What does it mean, Leon?"

"I do not know, señor."

"Here is our chance to escape."

"But there may be others upon the sloop."

"True, but hardly more than one or two, I should think, so we can master them."

"Señor."

"Well?"

"Suppose we swim out to the sloop, and if no one is there all right, we can slip on board."

"If we are seen running off with the sloop the schooners will be sent in chase and we will be taken."

"True, so let us hide on board in the hold and thus be taken off, for my idea is that the sloop will leave to-night, as those men are here to hide treasure."

"So it looks to me, señor."

"Well, let us swim out at once," and entering the water they struck out for the sloop.

All was quiet on board, and not a soul did they see.

Over the bows they boarded, and they saw that the little craft was deserted.

The hatch was open, so they slipped down into the hold, and discovered a good hiding-place.

Then they crept up and moved toward the cabin.

A light dimly burned within, but its rays were shaded so as not to be seen from without.

Entering the cabin they saw that a narrow door opened into the hold, so they felt that thus far all was in their favor.

"We cannot be caged up in the hold with no means to escape, señor."

"That is true, so in the hold we hide, as soon as we hear the boat coming off."

They waited for over half an hour, and then saw a dark object moving down the face of the cliff.

Then the boat came slowly off from where it had been left.

"There are but two men in it now, Leon."

"Yes, señor."

"One has remained ashore."

"True, señor."

"Now to hide," and they crept into their hiding-place among some freight that was there.

Soon the boat touched the side, and steps were heard overhead.

Then the anchor was hauled up and sail set.

Slowly the sloop glided through the waters, until out from under the lee of the island, when the breeze filled its sails, and it went dashing swiftly along.

The way she heeled to the breeze showed the fugitives that all sail was set, and that she was being rushed along at full speed for some reason.

Suddenly a step was heard overhead, and a man said in Spanish:

"We'll drop anchor off Panama, Bueno, before dawn."

"Yes, for we are running well," came back indistinctly from the man at the helm.

"When are we to make the run again?"

"One month from to night," was the answer from the helmsman.

"Well, we can enjoy our rest in Panama, Bueno," and the man, after hauling the jib halyard more taut, returned aft to the side of his comrade.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FROM OUT OF THE SEA.

THE king's cruiser, Porcupine, had dropped anchor off Graystone Hall on her way to sea, to there await further orders from Lord Hammond Hunter, who was sending her on a special mission.

About midnight a dispatch barge came alongside, and Sir Percy Travis, having received his last orders by her, got up anchor and stood out to sea.

All sail was set to make the run as quickly as possible out into the ocean, for the night looked as though it would end with ugly weather.

Through the Narrows swept the Porcupine, down the Lower Bay and out into the open sea, around the low point of Sandy Hook on which was the light-house shedding its bright beacon over the waters.

The storm that had been threatening had already broken far out at sea, and the waves ran high.

A drizzling rain was falling, storm-clouds hung low, and the winds shrieked ominously through the rigging as the Porcupine was put on her course to the southward.

Dawn was almost at hand when a fierce gale swept down upon the devoted ship, coming so suddenly and furiously in the darkness of night that the vessel was caught with more sail up than was safe for her to carry.

The sailors sprang to their posts and sail was rapidly lowered; but the jib-halyards became jammed, and, with the sail but one-third down, it was dragging the ship around under the fierce pressure of the wind.

Two men sprang out upon the bowsprit and cut away the sail if it could not be released from its jam and lowered, and a mighty plunge

of the vessel swept them away upon the wild waters, their terrified shrieks for help deterring others from daring to risk their lives to free the jib.

The strain of the sail threatened to carry away the spar, and Sir Percy Travis, who had in his anxiety come forward, called out:

"Who'll be the man to cut away that sail, for he makes a step toward an epaulette and the quarter-deck to do so!"

Not a man moved, and again came the commander's voice:

"An epaulette to the man who does the work!"

But as he spoke a cry of amazement arose from the crew, for as though out of the sea came a form.

Certainly it had not come from the deck, as it appeared beyond them.

And out upon the bowsprit crept that dark form, slowly but surely, and though waves tore over it, still it clung and went forward, forward until suddenly the sail was released from its hold and went flapping away upon the furious gale.

But the work was done, and the dark form came slowly back toward the deck.

Several times the ship plunged her bowsprit under, and all held their breath with fear.

But the form still clung there, and crept slowly toward safety.

The dawn was breaking, and the ship was now scudding along before the gale, but all eyes were upon the brave fellow who had risked his life to cut away the huge jib and free the vessel of the strain and danger.

Captain Sir Percy Travis had not returned to the quarter-deck.

He had lingered to see who it was that had risked life for an epaulette.

A moment more and the brave sailor would be safe; but the sharp nose of the Porcupine again buried itself in a mighty wave, and when it had passed all saw that the form was gone.

Not a wild yell broke from the crew, as they beheld him, made fast to a rope, which he had taken the precaution to do, and but for which he would have been swept away to death.

But he regained the spar, and in another instant staggered forward upon the fore-castle, and fell at the feet of Sir Percy Travis.

"Bear him to my cabin, and send the surgeon there," ordered Sir Percy.

The ordered was obeyed, and the bright light of the cabin fell upon a slender, but athletic form, and a face that was pale but handsome as an Apollo.

He was clad in the suit of a common sailor, but not a soul on the Porcupine had seemed to know him.

He was unconscious, but his heart fairly panted with the exertions he had made.

"Will he live, surgeon, or is he dying?" asked Sir Percy.

"He has struggled so desperately, sir, that he is utterly exhausted, and I think that is all," replied the surgeon.

"Now who is he?"

No one could answer the question.

"He looks like that gallant midshipman, Vernon Harcourt," said Sir Percy.

"Strangely so, sir," added a lieutenant.

"How came he on board the ship?"

No one knew.

"He did not go over the bows to cut away the sail."

"No, sir, he came up from the sea, it seemed."

And so the talk ran on, all amazed at finding an unknown man on the vessel, and one who had done such good work.

The men who had been forward were sent for and questioned by the commander.

Not a soul of them knew who the young man was, but all spoke of his resemblance to Midshipman Vernon Harcourt.

Then not one had seen him until he appeared out upon the bowsprit.

He had appeared to come from out the sea.

Certainly he had not gone out over the bows from the fore-castle of the Porcupine.

At last the surgeon said:

"See, sir, he opens his eyes and is all right, I am sure."

"Heaven grant it," fervently said Sir Percy.

The ship was bowling along before the storm, which however was dying out, and the young sailor opened his eyes and beheld a score of men about him.

He drew a long breath, and as his eyes flashed, said:

"I did it, sir, did I not?"

"You did, my brave lad, and you won an epaulette by your splendid courage."

"But who are you?"

"My name is Lionel Harcourt, sir," was the low reply.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AN EPAULETTE.

"YOUR name is Lionel Harcourt, you say?" exclaimed Sir Percy Travis, when the young hero had made known his name.

"Yes, sir," and with an effort Lionel arose to his feet, while the surgeon gave him a glass of brandy, which he drank.

"I know Midshipman Vernon Harcourt, now

absent with Lord Leslie Avon on a cruise, and a brave fellow he is.

"You are strangely like him, my lad."

"Vernon Harcourt is my brother, sir."

"Ah! I knew not that he had a brother."

Lionel smiled, and a strange smile it was.

"Yes, sir, I am his brother."

"A son of Lord Rosser Harcourt, who has made his home in America?"

"Yes, sir."

"Strange that your brother did not speak of you."

"No opportunity occurred for his doing so, perhaps, sir."

"True; but he proved himself a plucky fellow, for he has performed wonders, and well deserved the promotion he has won."

"But you?"

"I wished to be a sailor, sir, as is my brother, and so applied to Lord Hammond to enter for a middy's berth."

"He told me that my brother had won his position, and he could not appoint me unless I had done some deed deserving of it."

"Ah! and you have done so."

"Have I, sir?" and the eyes of the young sailor sparkled with pride.

"You certainly have, for you heard what I said to the men?"

"When, sir?"

"When I was forward and the ship was in danger."

"No, sir."

"Did you not hear my offer to any man who would cut away that sail?"

"I did not, sir."

"Where were you?"

Lionel was silent, and the question was repeated:

"Where were you?"

"I wish to explain, sir, and I hope you will not be angry with me."

"Out with it, my lad."

"As Lord Hammond would not give me a berth, sir, I determined to win one, and so wrote a note last night to my father, telling him I intended to go to sea before the mast."

"I saw your vessel drop anchor off my home, sir, and swam out to her, having rigged myself out in this sailor suit."

"I crawled up to a perch under the bows, and there waited."

"The vessel got up anchor and put to sea, but I kept my place, for I feared to be sent back if discovered."

"When we rounded the Hook I made myself fast with a rope-end which fortunately hung over the bows, and which I cut with my knife."

"I soon began to catch it pretty severely, but I clung on, and the poor fellows who were washed overboard both saw me as they were swept loose, I am sure."

"I saw that the jib was caught, so I determined to make my *entree* on the ship by relieving it, and so made myself fast to the spar overhead, as I got the chance between the duckings."

"Then I crept up and went out to release the sail, cutting the halyards with my knife, and I found it fortunate that I had made myself fast with the rope, as I would have gone when the Porcupine took that mighty plunge."

"As it was, I was torn loose, but the rope saved me."

"I hope, sir, you will forgive me for coming on board your vessel as I did."

The story of the young aristocrat, modestly told, had been listened to with deep attention by Sir Percy Travis and several of his officers, and all gazed into his handsome, resolute face with admiration.

"Forgive you, my lad, indeed I will, and I congratulate your father upon having two such sons as are you and your brother the middy."

"But you have begun as well as he has, and with no incentive other than to do your duty by the ship and her commander and crew."

"When I was forward, after my two men were lost, I offered an epaulette to any man who would cut away that sail."

"Brave as are the men under my command, not one dared face what he deemed certain death."

"You did so, you, a born aristocrat, and not a hardy seaman, and you triumphed."

"Not an officer or man on board this vessel will begrudge you your reward, and I now make you a passed midshipman, the same rank your brother holds, in the service of the King of England."

"For the present, until you are able, you will not do duty; but when you have fully recovered from your fatigue, you will report for orders to the first lieutenant, and the ship's tailor will rig you out in a uniform at short notice and supply you with what other things you need."

Lieutenant Leeds, let me present to you Midshipman Lionel Harcourt, for your friendly regard, of which he is most deserving, and who will report to you in a day or so for duty," and Sir Percy Travis turned to his first officer, who just then entered the cabin.

The weather-beaten old lieutenant grasped the hand of Lionel and said, warmly:

"You have begun well, my lad, and, though it took me long years to work up to an epau-

lette, you will always find a friend in Richard Leeds, as long as you are the man you have this night shown yourself to be.

"Come on deck with me and let the men have a look at you," and as the bluff old lieutenant showed himself on deck with the newly-appointed midshipman, discipline was forgotten and the crew of the Porcupine burst forth in a rousing cheer for the plucky lad, and there was not one of the honest tars who did not congratulate him upon his good fortune in going over the fore-castle and reaching the quarter-deck of a king's cruiser in one day.

And then, under escort of a brother midshipman, Lionel went to the shop of the ship's tailor, and when he reported for duty two days after, in his new uniform, he was voted the handsomest man on board the Porcupine, and he certainly had proven himself the pluckiest.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

DRIFTING TO A HAVEN.

TRUE to the words of one of the men who formed the crew of two who were on the little sloop which had so mysteriously visited the Island of Taboga, their vessel dropped anchor off the town before dawn broke.

They ran their vessel to a quiet anchorage, noiselessly dropped the anchor, and then furling the sails turned in for a rest in the small cabin.

To the delight of Juarez Morales and Leon they did not close the hatch, so that when they felt sure that the two men must be asleep, they crept upon deck and looked about them.

The lights of Panama glimmered in the darkness, while the East was growing light with the approach of dawn.

To launch the boat from the deck would awake the two men, so after a whispered conference the fugitives decided to swim ashore.

The distance was not very great, and both were bold swimmers, so they slipped over the side into the water and struck out.

It was a hard swim, for the tide was against them; but they struggled on and were nearing the shore when, with a low cry, Leon sunk from sight.

Juarez Morales was horrified, for the stirring of the waters near told him the cause.

His comrade had been seized by a man eater, or shark.

To tarry was to share his awful fate, and he struck out with desperate energy for the shore.

As he glanced over his shoulder he saw the waters becoming dyed with the blood of the poor man, and the fins of two man-eaters struggling over their game could be seen, for it was light now.

With tremendous strokes Juarez Morales urged himself through the waters, and at last his feet touched bottom and he staggered out upon the shore to fall in a heap, utterly exhausted by his struggles and prostrated with commingled grief and terror at the appalling fate of his brave companion, the brave Leon who had saved him from being hung as a pirate.

As the sun showed itself above the horizon, Juarez Morales arose and sought a place of refuge.

He had a little money with him, but a diamond ring and other jewelry that would bring him more, so that he was able to pay for accommodations.

He sought a sailors' inn, and secured a room, food and dry clothing, after which he threw himself down upon a bed to rest, for he was completely worn out.

It was late in the afternoon before he awoke, and glancing from his window out upon the waters, he started as his eyes fell upon the Mexican Coast Guard schooner.

He was sure that it had come to Panama to search for him.

He at once sought the keeper of the inn, and asked him if any vessels were to sail soon.

"A vessel leaves for New York to-night, senior, and you might get passage on her," was the answer.

"Take this gold and secure me a berth."

"Then find for me a padre's garb, keeping the balance for yourself, for I am on secret business, and do not care to be known."

"I will obey your commands, most noble senior," and the landlord hastily retired, for as he supposed his guest, from what he had said, to be a secret agent of the Government, he was anxious to get rid of him, for his own place would not bear close inspection as an honest inn.

In an hour's time the innkeeper returned, and he had secured a passage for a worthy priest, he said, on board of a swift-sailing vessel bound to New York.

He had also brought a priest's habiliments, with a razor for shaving, and certain other needful things for his generous guest, for the landlord still had a snug sum left for himself.

The brig was to sail about dark, so just in time to catch her, Juarez Morales, bearing the name of Padre Juan, left the inn and made his way down to the shore, a peon from the tavern carrying his traps.

Arriving at the shore, he took a shore-boat

for the brig, and went directly under the stern of the little cruiser.

"What is that craft doing in port?" asked the waterman.

"They say he came here to fetch back to Tobago the Government surgeon, to see the captain of the vessel who lies upon the island dangerously wounded, having been in a fight with a pirate, Senor Padre."

"Ah! that is bad; but is the surgeon going?"

"He is absent in Colon, Senor Padre, but they have sent across the Isthmus for him."

Juarez Morales made no response, and soon after was on board the brig.

She was a comfortable vessel, there were few passengers, and his quarters aboard were all that he could desire.

He was greeted with respect by the captain, and soon after the vessel got up anchor and stood out to sea upon her long voyage around Cape Horn to New York.

But Juarez Morales was still to be dogged by misfortune, for the fever broke out among the crew and several died from it.

Then the passengers were taken down, and one by one they passed away, while "Padre Juan" was forced to keep up his character as a priest, hear confessions and bury the dead.

The captain was the next victim, the first mate followed, and feeling no confidence in the other officer, Padre Juan was compelled to declare that he had been an officer in the navy before he had turned priest, and he took command of the vessel, greatly to the relief of the under officers, who felt anxious to get rid of the responsibility.

At length the fever died out, and with but two passengers left and one-third of a crew, the brig held on her way, presenting the strange spectacle of being under command of a man whom all believed to be a Catholic priest.

The voyage was a long and tedious one; but at last the Highlands of Navesink were sighted, the brig sailed into New York Harbor, and when the anchor was let fall, Juarez Morales hastened ashore, anxious to appear in another garb.

His steps led him by accident to the Beacon Inn, kept by Landlord Larry, and he secured good quarters there, stating that he would only occupy his room for a day or two, when his brother, a sailor, would arrive and take it, as he would be called away.

That night he ventured out to find a place where he could buy other clothing, so that he could cast aside his disguise as a padre.

He came upon the shop of Lawrence & Co., which was in fact the one owned by Larry of the Beacon.

Henry Hawthorn, the confidential clerk, was absent at the time, but Larry, in his disguise, was there, and he recognized the priest who was his guest.

He sent him over to a corner to select what clothes he wished, and went on with his figuring over his books.

Neither Larry nor the supposed priest saw two men enter the shop.

It was nearly dark, the shadows filled the shop, and the men entered cautiously, creeping toward Larry, who was wrapped up in his work.

They did not see the padre, back in the corner, and he, having selected what he needed, was turning to go to Larry with the things, when his eyes fell upon the two men.

Each held a knife in his hand, and they were close upon the unsuspecting shopkeeper.

They were hard-faced scamps, and their motive was plain.

Down went the bundle held by Juarez Morales, and with two mighty springs he was upon the men.

A blow of his fist felled one, while the other was in his strong grasp and a desperate struggle was begun.

But the two men fell and then one arose.

It was the padre, and the other had fallen upon his own knife and lay dead upon the floor.

Larry had in the mean time seen how matters stood, and, where the man felled by the supposed priest was but partially stunned, he took excellent care that he should trouble him no more, for, throwing himself upon him, he, too, began a fight for life and death.

And Larry, like the pretended padre, arose the victor, his opponent lying dead at his feet.

But Larry's disguise had been torn off in the struggle, and Juarez Morales recognized his landlord of the Beacon Inn.

"You have saved my life, father," said Larry.

"Yes, and I know you as my landlord."

"It is true, and I hope I can trust you with—"

"You can, as I will prove by telling you that I am no Spanish priest, as you believe, but a sailor, who, to escape death, assumed this disguise in a port in Central America."

"Let us be friends, for you will find one in me."

"I owe you my life, and more—I will close up my shop now, and to-night we will drop these bodies into the river."

"It will be better than reporting to the town officers, and then you return home with me as

my guest, for if you need aid I can give it to you, and work also if you wish it."

"I do need work, for I am friendless, in a strange land, and have but little money left."

Thus did Juarez Morales find a haven of refuge, and when he left the shop of Larry he went no longer as a pretended padre, but as a sailor.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE PIRATE-HUNTER.

WHEN the brig sailed from New York in chase of Red Hand, the Rover, Lord Leslie Avon felt that he could rely upon his vessel, which had been built as a privateer.

She was somewhat larger than the Destroyer, and though fitted out and armed hastily, had been most thoroughly prepared for a long cruise and for battle.

She carried two more guns than did the Destroyer, and four of the others were of larger caliber.

Then, too, her crew numbered one hundred men, and feeling that so far as armament and sailors went he had all he could wish, Lord Leslie Avon eagerly watched the sailing qualities of his vessel to see just what she could do.

The weather came on bad, and this gave him an opportunity to discover that he had an excellent sea-boat.

Then her speed was tested, and the young commander said, with considerable enthusiasm:

"I doubt, Mr. Harcourt, if the schooner Destroyer can outfoot us."

"And I do also, my lord," answered Vernon Harcourt, whom he had addressed.

"You had a chance to see the sailing of the schooner, so how does the brig compare with her?"

"I saw but little of the schooner, my lord, having carried her from where she was captured, I may say, up to the town."

"The old schooner belonging to Red Hand was along, and we had a race up to the anchorage, astern of the frigate King's Own."

"The pirate schooner was fast, was she not?"

"Yes, sir, but was in bad condition."

"But we beat her badly with less sail set on the Destroyer."

"And you think this brig would hold her own with the Destroyer?"

"From what I have seen of her performance, my lord, I would say she is equally as fast."

"But then you know sailors say that any craft is fast when she is alone."

"True, and we have nothing to test her with; but I hope we soon will have."

"Now, from what you heard among the pirates, where do you think Red Hand has gone?"

"With such a vessel under him as the Destroyer, I should think, my lord, that he would go to the Gulf to head off the richly freighted Spanish vessels to be found there and in the Caribbean."

"Then the Gulf and the Caribbean will be the places to look for him?"

"As well as among the West Indies, sir."

"Do you know the exact force the pirate has?"

"Eighty men, I think, sir."

"I must hear the story some day from your lips of how the schooner was taken, and afterward the Destroyer was recaptured."

"I tell you, Mr. Harcourt, when the king hears of that brave act he will send you a decoration, I am sure."

Vernon Harcourt made no reply.

He was always silent when the combat that captured the Sea Shark and retook the Destroyer was mentioned.

Accident had strangely favored him in causing others, because he had taken the two schooners up to town and surrendered them, to believe that he was the hero of their capture.

Not a word had been said about his brother, and he had kept silent regarding him and avoided the affair if discussed in a manner that was attributed to his modesty.

Lionel lay upon the bed of death, he felt sure, and with his brother dead, no shadow of the real truth of who the hero was, would come up before the public.

Accidental circumstances had helped him, and he hoped would continue to do so.

He had received the appointment as midshipman, he had been captured on board the Destroyer by the pirate, and he had sprung overboard and made a daring escape from Red Hand, so he too held claims to heroism.

If he could further distinguish himself on this pirate-hunting cruise, even should Lionel live, he would hold claims that would offset any discovery that he had not been the captor of the Sea Shark and Destroyer.

Not a word had he said thus far to imply that Lionel's act was his; but he had kept serenely quiet under the words of others that implied to him that they believed him to be the young hero of that night's work off Staten Island.

And so the brig held on her way southward, on her pirate-hunting expedition.

She had been christened the Venture, by her commander, and it did not take those under him long to discover that Lord Leslie Avon was

a skilled seaman, a fearless man, and one who was not to be driven from a purpose when he had set his mind upon it.

Vernon Harcourt was acting as a junior officer, out of courtesy for his past services, as believed, and he soon got into the routine of duties devolving upon him, and devoted himself untiringly to all that there was for him to do.

He became popular with his brother officers, was well liked by the crew, and Lord Avon seemed to have taken a great fancy to his handsome and daring young officer.

There was one thing that Vernon Harcourt wished above all others, and that was to win favor in the eyes of the beautiful young girl whom he had first met the day of his escape from Ronaldo the Red Hand.

From the first the eyes of little Lady Mildred Travis had penetrated his heart.

He had seen other lovely girls, but somehow this little English beauty had completely won his love, and he was determined to win fame that would keep him in her mind.

And so the Venture held on her way, running down the Southern coast, peeping in among the Bahamas, entering the Gulf and making its circuit, after which she cruised about among the West Indies.

Then she ran down into the Caribbean Sea.

A close watch was kept day and night from her decks and aloft, and vessels were sighted, overhauled and allowed to go their way, for the Red Hand was not one of them.

A small pirate craft, after a sharp action, had been captured; but the pirates knew nothing of Ronaldo the Red Hand, and all seamen talked to said that the Caribbean Sea was mostly his cruising-ground.

Though disappointed, Lord Avon did not despair, and so held down along the coast of Central America to one day sight three vessels running out from the coast of Panama.

One was a trim-looking frigate, flying the British ensign, another was a large merchantship, and the third was a brig, the latter also a merchantman.

After a long look at the three vessels through his glass, Lord Leslie Avon stamped his foot excitedly and cried:

"As I live, yonder is the Porcupine, and she has two prizes with her."

"What can she be doing here when we left her in New York?"

No one on board the Venture could answer his question.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE PORCUPINE'S CRUISE.

THE cause of the sailing of the Porcupine, so mysteriously, must now be made known.

Sir Percy Travis had gone into the hospital one day, accompanying Lord Hammond Hunter, and had come across the wounded prisoners from the schooner of Ronaldo the Red Hand.

Suddenly the English captain started, as his eyes fell upon a prisoner who was convalescent, and sat up with his arm in a sling.

"What, can I believe my eyes?"

"You here, Dutcher?" cried Sir Percy.

"Alas, my lord, it is too late."

"I was in hopes that you would not recognize me," answered the man, while his face colored deeply.

"And you are among these wounded pirates?"

"I am, Sir Percy."

"My lad, can I see this man alone?" and Sir Percy turned to Lord Hammond, who promptly ordered the wounded pirate to be brought into an adjoining room.

"Now, Dutcher, how is it I find you in this sad plight?" and, turning to Lord Hammond, Sir Percy continued: "My lord, this man and myself were lads together, for he was the son of my father's steward on the estate where I was born."

"He went to sea as a foremast hand, when I entered the king's service, and we served together for years, but at last became separated, and since then I have never heard of him."

"Now I find him here among these pirate prisoners, and I am sure that he has not willfully done wrong."

"I thank you, Sir Percy, for your good opinion of me, and in a measure it is deserved."

"I did not intend to leave you, but was captured by a gang of pirates, when ashore in Jamaica, and forced to serve them."

"It was long before I could make my escape; but at last I did so, and the vessel I set sail in from Monte Video, a Spanish merchant ship, was captured by Ronaldo, the Red Hand."

"He was merciless to the prisoners, so to save my life, I claimed to have been one of the crew of Colombo, the Corsair, for he had been the one whom I had been forced to serve."

"Ronaldo spared me, gave me a berth on his schooner, and for two years I have served him, for not a chance have I had to escape."

"The very night of our capture here, I intended to escape by swimming ashore, when our vessel was seized at its anchorage by the young man who took us prisoners and afterward retook the schooner."

"Such is my story, Sir Percy, and it is a true one."

"I believe you, Edward Dutcher, and I sympathize with you in your misfortunes."

"I hope your wound is not dangerous."

"No, Sir Percy, a mere flesh-wound from a bullet."

"My lord," and Sir Percy turned to Lord Hammond, "I will be responsible for this man, if you will allow him to go with me."

"You have heard his story, and I will vouch for its truth, for I have known, as I told you, Edward Dutcher from boyhood."

"You can take the man with you, Sir Percy."

"Thank you, my lord."

"In return, my lord, I would like to do a service which I believe it is in my power to render."

And the seaman turned to Lord Hammond Hunter.

"Speak out, my man."

"I told Sir Percy that I had served a couple of years with Ronaldo, the Red Hand."

"Yes."

"I know where he has his retreat."

"Ah!"

"I could pilot a vessel-of-war to it, and, though his schooner is not often there, he keeps an old hulk there, a score or more of people, considerable booty and the wounded among his crew."

"This is indeed valuable news."

"If his schooner should not be there, the vessel-of-war could remain in hiding until its return, and he could be taken."

"True; and you know this place?"

"I do, my lord."

"And will pilot a vessel thither?"

"I will, my lord."

"Where is this rendezvous?"

"It is on the coast of the Isthmus of Panama, my lord."

"So far?"

"Yes, sir; for Ronaldo, the Red Hand has been cruising in the Southern waters and running around occasionally into the Pacific, as far up as Taboga Island."

"Then he found this retreat on the Caribbean shore of Panama Isthmus, and it is a safe retreat, and one which no one would suspect the existence of, even if he passed close inshore with a boat."

"But a vessel-of-war can enter there?"

"Yes, my lord."

"What is the depth of water there?"

"All of twenty feet, my lord, and the retreat would hide half a dozen frigates, if need be."

"Then you are worth your weight in gold, Edward Dutcher, and the knowledge you possess shall at once be made use of."

"Sir Percy, when could your vessel sail?"

"I can get her in trim very soon, my lord."

"Well, I wish you would put her in first-class trim, and for a long cruise."

"I desire you to go in search of Lord Leslie Avon and his vessel."

"If you find him, place this man on board, that he may serve as his pilot to the rendezvous of this Ronaldo the Red Hand."

"Do not now ever go out of your course very far to find Lord Avon, but steer on a southerly course, your destination being the Isthmus of Panama, and looking for the brig the while."

"Should you not find the brig, then you are to go on with your vessel and, under this man's guidance, capture the stronghold of the Red Hand."

"I would order you at once there, but in justice to Lord Avon, who volunteered for the especial duty of pirate-hunting, I must ask you to try and find him; but if not, then act for yourself."

"My man, I place you in the keeping of Sir Percy Travis," and soon after Lord Hammond, Sir Percy and Edward Dutcher left the hospital together.

Some time after the Porcupine, as has already been seen, started upon her cruise, and on board of her went Lionel Harcourt.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

RED HAND'S MISSION.

WHEN Juan Mora, for the reader has recognized that person, the former Mexican Captain Juarez Morales, saw Ronaldo, the Red Hand, go ashore at the lagoon, at his retreat on the Isthmus of Panama, he kept a close watch of his movements.

The words of the pirate chief had told him that he was going away for awhile.

Where could he go upon that wild coast?

That was what the pirate lieutenant wished to know.

It will be remembered that Juan Mora, as Juarez Morales, had been an officer on a Mexican cruiser as a Coast Guard, under the Spanish flag.

Antonio La Paz, a Spaniard, had been his commander.

Then had come the death of Señor Morales and his daughter, at the hands of Red Hand, and Juan Mora, as I will now call him, had started forth upon the track of the murderer.

His falling in love with Camilla Bianca on the Island of Taboga had delayed him, and then

came Captain La Paz upon the scene, his denunciation of the Mexican as a pirate, the double duel, fatal to Carlos, and nearly so to the Spaniard, the capture of the avenging schooner and the flight of her commander.

Up to the time of his arrival in New York, Juan Mora had done no lawless act in the real sense of the word.

He had not committed piracies upon the high seas, as charged, and yet, when Ronaldo, the Red Hand, the man he longed to meet, had appeared upon the scene, then he had determined to go with him, as the opportunity offered, that he might in the end take his life and capture his vessel.

He waived the fact that to do this he must serve as an officer under the noted pirate.

He looked only to the means to gain the end he sought.

So it was that he had, as Larry, the landlord of the Beacon, had urged, gone on board of the schooner, selected a crew and arranged all for the cutting out of the vessel which was to hoist the dreaded black flag of Red Hand, the Rover.

He had quietly done the duties devolving upon him, and when piracies had been committed on the run of the schooner southward, had submitted with what grace he could.

He held the end in view of entrapping Red Hand and his vessel; but it would take some time to accomplish it.

Into the retreat, then, the schooner went, accompanied by her two prizes, the merchant ship and brig.

And leaving Juan Mora in charge, for he had perfect confidence in him, Red Hand had mounted a mule, and with a pack animal following, had ridden away alone through the forest.

"But where?"

That was what troubled Juan Mora.

And he would be a month away.

If he was actually needed, then communicate with Parna, the peon, and he would find him, Red Hand had said.

This showed that Parna must know where the chief had gone, and where he was going to spend that month.

The plan of Juan Mora was plain before him, and that was to cultivate Parna if he wished to find out anything about Red Hand and his visit to some mysterious point away from the rendezvous.

Going aloft he had seen Red Hand join Parna, and afterward the woman, Numa, came upon the scene.

He had seen the mules brought, the packs put upon one and the pirate chief mounting the other, ride away into the forest alone.

There was some mystery in all this, and Juan Mora was determined to solve it if he could.

To do this he began to at once cultivate the peon and his wife.

He sent for Parna to come on board the schooner.

The Indian came, gorgeous in his barbaric attire.

"I have sent to ask your advice, Parna, for the chief has left me in charge."

"I have much to do while he is absent, for he will remain only a month, and I find I will need some paints and other things, so where can I get them?"

"At Panama, señor."

"Ah, yes, but that is a long ways from here."

"A day's journey through the forest only, señor."

"And I can get there what I wish?"

"Yes, señor."

"I wish I could have known about this before, so that I could have sent you with the chief."

"I can go alone, señor."

"It would be too late to overtake the chief?"

"Yes, señor."

"But if you went you could find him there, and tell what I wanted."

"He will not remain in Panama, señor."

"Ah, yes, he will at once leave it?"

"He never remains there, señor, longer than to get aboard of his vessel and leave the harbor."

"Yes, I had forgotten that."

Juan Mora's sly questioning was getting results.

He knew that Red Hand had gone to Panama, and that he would not remain there longer than to get on his vessel and set sail.

But where would he go from Panama? What vessel had he there awaiting him?

"But may he not find his vessel away?"

"No, señor, she never leaves port except under his orders."

"That is true; but might not a craft be gotten to follow him, for it is most important that I find out from the chief certain matters he overlooked, and secure some purchases which are needed?"

"After he sails from Panama, señor, no one could find him."

"Why?"

"Not a soul knows where he goes."

"No one?"

"None except the men on his sloop."

"Could not his agent in Panama tell?"

"Alonzo would know nothing, señor, for he simply changes goods into gold for the chief."

"I see," and Juan Mora was glad to have found out that the Red Hand had sailed in a sloop, and more, that his agent was Alonzo.

"I expect I will have to go to Panama myself, Parna, to make the needed purchases, so you could supply me with a mule, and also could go with me, or get me a guide?"

"I can give you a mule, señor, and if you give him his head he will take you to Panama without a halt."

"All right, Parna, if I have to go I will do so, and I will need a pack-animal to bring back the purchases I make."

"You shall have the two beasts, señor, when you need them."

"Thank you, good Parna."

"Here are some presents for you and your wife," and the sailor gave the peon a number of things which quite won his heart.

Then he went to work with the air of one who had made an important discovery, and having gotten affairs to suit him, the next day he mounted one of Parna's mules, and with a pack-animal following, set off for Panama, determined to solve the mystery of Red Hand's going there.

CHAPTER XL.

MYSTERIOUS MOVEMENTS.

WHEN Red Hand left the hill overhanging the lagoon where his vessels were at anchor, he rode away into the dense forests that ran back from the sea-shore, and followed the narrow trail quietly toward the center of the isthmus.

It was a desolate, lonely ride in the extreme. Only the cries of wild birds, or the howls of wild animals reached his ears, and the path led at first through a regular jungle, as wild as any in India.

The trees were all of a tropical kind, Spanish mosses hung like funeral drapery from the boughs, and pools of black-looking water, filled with loathsome creatures, every now and then appeared along the way.

As he advanced the land began to get firmer, and the path ascended until the hill land was reached.

Then the trail led around valleys, through ravines and over hills until it again began to descend, and after another ride through low country, Red Hand came in sight of the port of Panama.

He seemed, however, a different looking man from the one who had left the lagoon, for he had changed his attire, a wig of long hair fell upon his shoulders, and his face had been darkly bronzed.

He appeared to know Panama well, for he rode directly toward a Spanish inn, and, the landlord recognizing him, gave him welcome.

Then he led him into pleasant quarters, gave him water with which to bathe and refresh himself, and afterward set before him a most tempting supper, with several bottles of rare old wine.

After the meal Red Hand, still in his disguise, bade the keeper of the inn care for his mules until his return, and with a few more words departed in the darkness for a lower part of the town near the water.

A dimly-lighted shop upon a corner was open, and into this he went.

"Oh, señor!" cried a Spaniard who sat at a table making up some accounts.

"I am back again, Alonzo."

"Yes, after a long absence."

"I will close my shop and we can have a talk over matters."

"But have you any goods?"

"Yes, send your clerk to the inn for the bundle I have there."

This the man Alonzo did, and when he had closed his shop he led the way to an inner room, where, over a bottle of wine, the two sat down for a talk.

As though the man knew all about him, Ronaldo, the Red Hand, coolly related his adventures and added:

"Of course I lost considerable with my old schooner; but I have a craft that will soon make it up for me and my men."

"I am glad you are pleased with your new vessel, señor."

"Yes; but what I bring you this time is not of very great value."

"Ah! here is your man now," and as the pirate spoke the Spaniard's clerk entered with the two bundles brought on the pack-mule from the lagoon retreat.

"Now, go to the craft, Brentano, and tell my men to be ready to sail within half an hour, and to have a boat at the usual place for me."

"Yes, señor," said the man.

"Here is gold for you, and if there are red stains on it you will not mind, Brentano," and with a light laugh the chief gave the man several gold-pieces, and he at once departed.

Alonzo then opened the bundles, glanced over the laces and costly fabrics in one, and then at the gold, silver and gemmed trinkets in the other.

"A fair lot, señor, and worth, say, ten thousand pesos."

"Give me the gold, Alonzo, and quickly, for I wish to be off."

"I will, señor; but when do you return?"

"Within the month."

"Here is the gold, señor," and taking from a secret repository several bags of glittering coins, Alonzo counted out the ten thousand pesos.

"All ready, señor, for the boat is at the shore, and sail is up," said Brentano, entering the room.

Red Hand then arose, fastened the bag of gold to his belt and left the house, wending his steps down toward the harbor.

He soon reached a desolate part of the shore and beheld a man standing by a boat.

"Welcome, chief," said the man, as he approached in the darkness, and he took his hand off the hilt of a knife he wore in his belt.

"Bueno, you are on hand, I see."

"Yes, señor."

"And Toma?"

"On the vessel, señor."

"Any news of any kind since I left?"

"No, señor; but we were becoming alarmed about you, on account of your long stay."

"But I am here."

"Yes, señor, but we feared you were dead, or had been captured."

"You were pretty nearly right, Bueno, for I had a close shave with death, and also came near being captured."

"But Satan looks after those he loves, Bueno."

"Yes, señor," and the Red Hand having entered the boat, Bueno took up the oars and pulled away from the shore.

There were few vessels in the harbor, and, as it was getting late, no other boats seemed to be stirring upon the waters.

By several craft at anchor Bueno held his way and at last ran alongside of a small vessel that was anchored, yet had her mainsail set.

"Welcome, señor," said a man who met the boat at the side.

"Ah, Toma, I am with you once more; but let us get off, for this wind seems fair and we must not lose it."

"We are all ready, señor," was the reply, and the anchor was quickly heaved up, the jib set, and the little craft held on its way out of Panama Harbor, destined for some port to which business, hatred, love or pleasure called Red Hand the Rover.

CHAPTER XLI.

A SPY ON HIS TRACK.

FOLLOWING the same trail which Red Hand had done, Juan Mora arrived in good time in the town of Panama, and he put up at the same tavern where he had sought refuge when he had escaped from Taboga with the unfortunate Leon.

This happened also to be the place where Red Hand had stopped, and as on former visits the chief had ridden the mules which Juan Mora brought, the landlord recognized them and wondered.

Then he also recognized the young man for whom he had procured a year before the dress of a padre and some baggage, at the same time securing for him a passage on a vessel bound to New York.

And so the landlord wondered the more, for at that time his guest had hinted that he was a secret agent of the Spanish Government, and had been feared and respected accordingly.

But, seeming to understand just who Red Hand was, the innkeeper was at a loss to know why this Government agent was coming so close upon his heels.

But Juan Mora was made welcome, and when he asked the way to the shop of Alonzo the merchant, the innkeeper wondered still the more.

But Juan Mora sought the shop, and he had seen a pair of mules in the stable of the inn, which he had an idea were those brought by the Red Hand, and the stable-boy had confirmed this belief by stating that a cavalier had arrived with them the day before.

"And where is the señor?"

The boy did not know, or at least he said so.

Then Juan Mora went to the shop of Alonzo.

That person eyed him closely, but when he asked if the Señor Captain was there, he looked alarmed, and said:

"Who does the señor mean?"

"You are Alonzo?"

"Yes, señor."

"The chief came here, for I am his lieutenant, and hastened after him, hoping to catch him here."

"I am at the Harbor Inn, where the captain's mules are; but where is the chief, Señor Alonzo?"

Still the man hesitated, and Juan Mora continued:

"Parna told me to come to you."

"Ah, yes, señor; but if you would see the señor, you are too late."

"He has gone?"

"Yes, señor?"

"When?"

"He sailed last night."

"How is the weather, for can he have gone far by this time?"

"His vessel has not yet returned, señor."

"And will he return in it?"

"No, señor; he will return however within the month, he told me."

"So said he to me; but perhaps you can help me in the purchases I need, Señor Alonzo."

"I will be more than happy to serve you, señor."

Juan Mora then gave a list of the things he wished to purchase, among them being a quantity of blood-red paint.

Of course Alonzo had everything that was needed, at least so he said, and Juan Mora left him to get the things together and deliver them, ready packed for the mule to carry back, at the Harbor Inn.

Then Juan Mora took a stroll along the harbor, and, taking a fancy to sail on the waters, he hired a small craft to go in.

It was an humble fishing-craft, and the three men on board were very communicative when they had received an incentive in the way of a Spanish *onza* each.

"Has any vessel left the harbor of late?"

"None, señor, at least for a week."

"Not any craft whatever?"

"Well, one had, two nights before."

"What was it?"

"A sloop, such as the North American people build."

"A trader?"

"Well, yes, señor; a slow trader between Taboga, Tabernilla and the other islands maybe."

"A slow trader?"

"Yes, señor, a craft that does not make regular trips."

"Sometimes she lies in port for months."

"Ah! who was her captain?"

"One Toma, a Spaniard, and he had only one man to help him by the name of Bueno."

"Ah!" muttered Juan Mora, and he added to himself:

"Such were the names I heard the two men call each other the night poor Leon and I escaped from Taboga."

After further questioning he became convinced that it was the very same craft, and he could not but wonder how strange was the circumstance.

So he told the men to put back for the shore, and carefully noted each vessel in port.

Then he went to his quarters ashore, and after a good night's rest strolled down to the harbor the next morning.

"Ah! there is the sloop."

"She has come in during the night; but has Red Hand also returned?"

This thought seemed to give him some uneasiness, so getting into a boat he pulled out to the little sloop.

He was hailed when near it and asked his business.

"Could I charter your craft to run me to Taboga?"

"No."

"I will pay well."

"No."

"Let me come aboard and talk over the matter with you."

"No!"

The last no was more emphatic than the others, so Juan Mora returned to the shore and to his inn.

The things were there which he had purchased of Alonzo, and a second visit to the shopkeeper revealed the fact that Red Hand had not returned with the sloop.

Then Juan Mora mounted his mule, and with the pack-animal following, started back for the lagoon.

"I must bide my time yet awhile," he said to himself.

"But I am convinced that Taboga holds some interest for Red Hand, and more, that he visits it secretly."

"Well, I am on his track; I shall spy out all of his movements."

"Yes, Ronaldo, the Red Hand, is doomed, and some day I will avenge my poor sister and father, whom he so cruelly murdered."

That night Juan Mora slept again upon the schooner, and altogether he seemed pleased with the results of his visit to Panama.

CHAPTER XLII.

A PLEDGE RECALLED.

I WILL now return to the island of Taboga, and after the duel in which Carlos had been killed, and the captain of the Mexican cruiser had been run through by Juan Mora.

In that duel Don Delos Bianca had acted the part of second to Captain Antonio La Paz, because that officer had come ashore and urged it.

The captain was proud of his record as a duelist, and he was anxious to have Don Delos see him kill both Carlos and Juan Mora.

He thought it would all go to the ears of Camilla Bianca.

That the maiden had been engaged to Juan Mora made not a scintilla of difference to the Señor La Paz.

He had exposed Juan Mora to her as a pirate, thus preventing her from becoming the wife of a rover of the seas.

In this he felt that he had a claim upon her.

In revenge the Mexican had challenged him, and, as Captain La Paz put it, in the hope of

adding greater laurels to himself, had forced him to fight his lieutenant as well.

In this double duel the Spaniard expected to come out with flying colors, and he wished Don Delos Bianca to be in a position to report all that occurred to Camilla.

With the claim of having saved her from a pirate, he supposed he could weed her heart of all memory of Juan Mora, and plant there only affection for himself.

He was as vain as a peacock, and he was so conceited that he did not believe that Camilla could resist his infatuations.

The Padre Polo had hinted that the Don was worth a very large sum, and so the Spanish captain had a longing for it, along with a beautiful wife.

The duel, however, did not turn out as Captain La Paz had expected or hoped.

He had carried out his intention in part, for he had killed Carlos, and that was half the battle.

He was aware that his former lieutenant was a powerful fellow and a good swordsman; but Captain La Paz felt no dread that he was good enough to give him even a partial fight.

Great therefore was his surprise when Juan Mora pressed him from the first, forced him back, gave him only a chance to defend himself and then ran him through.

Don Delos was scarcely less surprised.

The wounded man, as has been said, was taken to the home of Don Delos and there cared for, greatly to the delight of the treacherous surgeon of Juan Mora's vessel, who thereby found himself an inmate of the fine old home, with the best in the land to live on, for he made the Spaniard feel that he must be constantly near him.

The captain was given a most comfortable room, a special servant was appointed to wait upon him, and the Don did all in his power to make his guests comfortable.

Having done his duty as host, he sought Camilla and told her all that had happened.

She was pale and anxious, but perfectly calm.

"He killed the Señor Carlos, father?" she asked.

"Yes; ran him through the heart, and then I expected to see him kill Juarez Morales with the same sword."

"But he did not?"

"Did not!"

"Why, you should have seen that fight, my child."

"You would have enjoyed it, for Morales drove him from the start, and all that La Paz could do was to defend himself."

"I tell you, Camilla, it was grand."

"And will he die?"

"That depends, for he is in a fair way to die now."

"And Juarez?"

"You mean the pirate, Morales?"

"Yes, if you prefer so to call him."

"I do, for did not La Paz say so?"

"True! and the Señor Captain Morales gave him the lie and forced him to fight him."

"But where is he, father?"

"In the sea-view room."

"I mean Captain Juarez Morales."

"Oh, he has fled."

"Whither?"

"On the island up among the tamarind thickets."

"But why?"

"Well, a sailor came and told him that his vessel had surrendered to the lieutenant of the cruiser, for it was all a plot of La Paz to get possession of the craft while her captain was away."

"But that was infamous treachery, father."

"Not against a pirate, my child."

"And Morales fled?"

"Yes."

"But he will be taken?"

"Of course, sooner or later, and hanged."

"Hanged?"

"Of course, for he is a pirate."

Camilla made no response just then, and her father went on telling about the clever trick of Captain La Paz, which had gotten possession of the schooner of Juarez Morales.

Then, as the maiden had little to say, he left the room to see how his guest was.

Captain La Paz was in terrible fear of dying, so gave orders that his vessel should be sent to Panama for the Government surgeon stationed there, and that he should be brought with all haste.

The schooner went on her errand, and returned after some delay with the surgeon, who pronounced the chances of life good for the Spanish captain, if he had careful nursing.

"I will devote myself to him," said the treacherous surgeon of Juarez Morales's vessel, and he added:

"Because he has pardoned me."

But the real reason was that he wished to enjoy the good cheer of Don Delos Bianca's hospitality, and to be near the beautiful Camilla to enjoy her society, for the surgeon also had a vast amount of conceit and hoped to win the lovely girl now that his captain was out of the way and branded with the name of a pirate.

The days passed slowly by, and each one add-

ed to the chances of the recovery of the wounded Spaniard.

The whole force of the cruiser had been put ashore to search the island, and a reward offered by Captain La Paz, for Juarez Morales, dead or alive, had caused the idlers to also turn out to help look him up.

In their anxiety to earn the reward some ventured to the Castle, the home of the old Don, Dolores, but they did not tarry there when they were told to go, and if they did not, the bloodnounds kept by the old hermit would be set upon them.

They wisely came to the conclusion that Don Dolores was not the man to harbor a fugitive pirate.

Every cavern on the island that was known, every tamarind thicket, the dense foliage on El Morro, even, was thoroughly hunted through, but of course without any result hoped for.

At length the search was given up, the fugitives had either escaped or fallen from the cliffs and been drowned, it was decided, and the interest of the people turned upon the recovery of Captain La Paz.

That personage felt that he was getting well, and he began to feel that he would win renown for his clever capture of the pirate schooner and her crew.

Of course the prize-money would be considerable, and that would help him pay his debts.

Then he had determined to make a bold stroke for the *Señorita Camilla's* hand.

He had quite won over the Don, who looked upon the Spanish captain as a very important person, and from the way he talked, concluded that he must be a man of vast wealth.

The Don, therefore, would be willing for him to marry his lovely daughter, in spite of the fact that Captain La Paz was double her age.

The weeks went by, and months had been formed before Captain La Paz at last considered himself well.

His cruiser had been doing duty along the coast, under her first officer, but the captured vessel had been kept in port under the orders of the Spaniard, in case he should need her services, and the crew of the craft had been equally divided between the two, and were found to be all that could be wished of them.

At last Captain La Paz determined to make a formal demand for the hand of *Señorita Camilla*.

The maiden did not like the man, nor did she dislike him.

The word of her father was as a law to her, and she could not but yield to his demand that she should accept Captain La Paz as her husband.

Her love had all been given to Juarez Morales, but that was in the past, and she had buried it in a grave in her heart.

Then the captain promised to carry her to Spain, to resign from the navy and go to live in the grand city of Madrid, and she longed to leave Taboga and its memories forever behind her.

So she consented to become the *Señora La Paz*, when the Spanish officer should come to claim her.

Away he sailed with his two schooners, and within half a year he was to return.

And promptly the cruiser bearing his colors sailed into the port of Taboga, when the time was up, and the Spaniard hastened ashore to greet his intended bride.

But she met him with a calm face and told him that it could not be, adding:

"I made a solemn pledge long ago, one I never expected I would be called upon to keep.

"It was a pledge in return for my life, and I must keep it, for he to whom I made it demands it."

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE DON'S DEMAND.

It was a few days before the return of Captain Antonio La Paz to claim the *Señorita Camilla Bianca* as his bride that that young lady took a walk, as had been her custom of late, to a point of observation at the top of the Island of Taboga.

Her face was, if anything, more beautiful than ever, but it had been softened by sorrow, and that sorrow was that she had loved and lost.

If she had a belief in her heart that her lover had not been a pirate, as accused by Captain La Paz, she had not so expressed herself.

He had merited the accusation she knew, had offered his life against that of the renowned duelist in defense of his honor, and was a fugitive, or dead, she knew not which.

What his fate was she could only conjecture, and naturally it gave her deep sorrow to contemplate it.

As the time drew near for the return of Captain La Paz to claim her she grew restless and was wont to take long walks, and alone.

She loved the island which so long had been her home, and yet it was only for memories of the past that she did so.

Some strange reason, what, she had never known, had brought her father there, and he

seemed to love to remain there, almost in hiding as it were.

In her walks she had many times gone to the scene of the double duel on the Morro.

The grave of the faithful lieutenant was there to mark the spot, and at its head she had placed a simple cross of wood with his name and the date of his death.

A week more and Captain La Paz would return, so, more restless than ever, she extended her walk one pleasant afternoon up the valley to the hill-tops.

She halted not very far from The Castle, the home of Don Dolores.

As for that old Spaniard, he had not been seen often of late.

He had seemed to grow more fond of his hermit life each year, and few there were who ever saw him leave his own domain.

Don Delos Bianca had several times called upon him, and once to ask him to attend his daughter's wedding.

But the old servant had said that the Don was ill, and he sent no word of thanks, acceptance or refusal to the invitation.

As she stood in the shadow of the tamarinds, on the evening in question, the eyes of *Camilla Bianca* turned upon the grand old home of Don Dolores, and she was thinking of the strange old man, when a step near her caused her to start.

Turning she beheld Don Dolores.

His white hair and beard, his Spanish cloak, erect attitude and fine eyes gave him a striking appearance, and she bowed low before the man who had been such a mystery to all upon the island.

"I trust I have not alarmed you, *Señorita Bianca*," he said, in a voice that was strangely soft and winning.

"I thought I was alone, señor; but no, I am not alarmed, and I am glad to see you."

"It is a pleasure to hear you say so, *señorita*; but your face has saddened since I saw it last, though it is even more lovely."

She blushed at the words, and replied:

"It has been a long time since we met; but it is your fault, Don Dolores."

"Have you cared to see me?"

"I have, and also has my father."

"The Don, your father, called upon me to ask me to attend your marriage with one Captain La Paz, a captain in the Spanish Navy, and commanding a Coast Guard cruiser of the Mexican colony."

"Will you attend, Don Dolores?"

"No."

"I wish that you would do so."

"Answer me, who is Captain La Paz?"

"Just what you a moment before said of him, señor."

"Do you know aught else regarding him?"

"What else is there to know, señor?"

"He is a duelist."

"I know that, señor."

"He is a gambler."

"I feared that."

"He is poor, with only the money he gets from prizes beyond his pay."

"You appear to know him, señor."

"I know of him only; but do you love him?"

"Señor!"

"Pardon me, but I ask as an old man, from interest in you?"

"I do not love him."

"You have met one you loved?"

"I have."

"Where is he?"

"Don Dolores, you are looking into my heart now seeking to uncover its secrets."

"Will you not tell me?"

"How can it interest you?"

"I will tell you afterward."

"What would you know?"

"Who is the man you love?"

"Alas, Don Dolores, I do not know whether he lives or is dead."

"You must have known of him, for his vessel lay in the harbor here for a long while, and I was pledged to him."

"But Captain La Paz came and told me that he was a pirate, and then followed the duel which you must know of, the killing of *Señor Carlos*, the wounding of Captain La Paz and the flight of Captain Morales."

"My father urged me to become the wife of Captain La Paz; I promised, and he will be here soon to claim me."

"And not loving him you yet will marry him?"

"I must."

"Why not refuse?"

"I dare not."

"And you do not wish to marry him?"

"From my heart, no!"

"Then you shall not."

"But, Don Dolores, what do you mean?"

"I will prevent it."

"But you cannot."

"I can."

"Pray tell me how?"

"Have you forgotten, *Señorita Camilla Bianca*, that when I saved your life you made me a pledge?"

"I have not forgotten it."

"You pledged yourself to grant my request, whenever I asked it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I now demand that you keep that pledge. I now demand that you become my wife!"

CHAPTER XLIV.

THE TWO DONS.

SEÑORITA BIANCA was positively startled at the words of the old Don.

That he should demand her pledge kept in such a way as he had she had never dreamed.

But she gazed into his face, and she could not but admire it.

He had risked his life to save her from death. He had been so brave, so manly.

She compared his splendid physique with the slender form and narrow shoulders of Captain La Paz.

She looked into his face, and though it was almost hidden under his flowing beard and curling gray hair, she saw that it seemed more youthful than his silvery locks indicated.

His voice was full, rich and firm, while that of Captain La Paz was always pitched upon a high key.

There was a calm dignity or conscious power about Don Dolores that fascinated her.

If she must be sacrificed, to become the wife of the Don was far preferable than to be *Señora La Paz*.

In her quick comparison of the two men she found that the Spanish captain suffered greatly.

The Don, from his hair and beard, appeared old enough to be her grandfather; but she knew that Captain La Paz was more than double her years.

Then her pledge arose before her.

Was it not paramount to her promise to marry the Spanish captain?

She so contrived it, and she said:

"You hold me to my pledge, Don Dolores?"

"I do."

"You ask me to become your wife?"

"Yes."

"If I refuse?"

"Do you mean on account of a repugnance to me, or because you are engaged to La Paz?"

"The latter."

"You ask what I will do?"

"Yes."

"You have no feeling against me?"

"On the contrary I regard you with the highest esteem."

"Then I shall call La Paz out, kill him and marry you."

"Are you in earnest?"

"I am."

"You really mean it?"

"Why not?"

"He is the most dangerous duelist known."

"I really have no dread of him."

"Well, I will not allow you to risk your life against such a fearful man, so I will keep my pledge."

"And become my wife?"

"Yes, if father does not refuse."

"Why should he?"

"He knows nothing of you."

"Let me say, then, that I am no worse than La Paz."

"Will you see my father?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"To-night I will call upon him."

"Suppose he refuses?"

"He will not."

"But should he?"

"I will marry you, anyhow."

Camilla laughed right out.

It was the first time she had laughed in many a long day.

There was something about this elderly lover that commanded her respect, he was so in earnest, so fearless in his bearing.

After awhile she said:

"Well, I made you a pledge, and I will keep it."

"See my father, and then we will decide what is best to be done."

"I know."

"But see my father first."

"I will, and as it is growing twilight I will escort you home and see him now."

With courtly grace Don Dolores offered his arm, and the two walked slowly down the valley path toward the home of Don Delos.

There was surprise upon the face of all when they saw them enter together, and Don Delos fairly bounded from his chair at the sight of his hermit neighbor and his daughter coming in together.

"Be seated, my dear Don Dolores, and have supper with us, for the meal is nearly ready."

"Thank you, no, Don Delos; but I have come to see you upon an important matter."

The Don bowed and led the way to his own sitting-room.

Then Don Dolores took a seat and said:

"Don Delos Bianca, I believe you have engaged your daughter to Captain La Paz, of the Spanish Navy?"

"Yes, and I called to ask you to honor us by being present at the wedding."

"I wish to recall to you, Don Delos, that some time ago I saved your daughter's life."

"Can I forget it, señor?"

"At that time she made me a pledge to grant what I might some day ask her."

"Well?"

"I to-day asked her to be my wife."

"Your wife?"

"Yes, for if you would let her marry a man as old as you are, one a few years older can make no difference."

"But it is all arranged that she is to marry Captain La Paz."

"Her pledge to me antedates her engagement to La Paz."

"He will be here in a short while, I expect him daily in fact, and the marriage will take place."

"I say no."

"And I say I will have no interference, señor," hotly returned Don Delos.

Don Dolores smiled, but answered:

"Let us understand each other, señor."

"I understand all, sir."

"My dear Don Delos, don't be hasty, for you will only regret it."

"I will not."

"On the contrary you will, and you do not wish to retract words, for it is so unpleasant, you know."

"What I say I'll maintain."

"We will see."

"So we shall see."

"Señor, let me say to you, to begin with, that I know just why you came to Taboga."

Don Delos started and turned pale.

"I know, Don Delos, that you came here, erected your home, and this place has never met your expectations."

"I do not understand," and Don Delos fairly gasped out the words.

"I'll be more explicit, señor."

"You had a brother who turned pirate, and he made a large sum of money by his robberies upon the high seas."

"He came to the island of Taboga and buried his treasure."

"But he was captured, sentenced to be hanged, and before he went to the gallows told you where that booty was hidden."

"You lost the map and directions, so came here, built your home over where you thought it was hidden, and have in vain searched for it."

"Your money which you had is about used up, and you are a poor man."

"You believe La Paz to be rich, and you also fear him, so you give him your daughter, and when he is gone, with her, you intend to prosecute your search for this treasure."

"Now, La Paz has nothing other than his pay and prize-money, and he is a brute in nature."

"I certainly can be no worse, and besides I am a very rich man, as I can readily prove to you."

"Your daughter made me a pledge, and I hold her to it, and you will dismiss La Paz and give her to me."

"My God! he will kill me."

"Leave him to me."

"But dare you tell him, dare you face him?"

"Yes, I dare," was the calm response of Don Dolores, and there was a look in his eyes that showed that he meant all that he said.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE DON AND THE CAPTAIN.

BOTH Don Dolores and his lovely daughter were a trifle nervous at the turn affairs had taken.

The father did not care to make known to the daughter what had passed between Don Dolores and himself.

He did not wish to tell her that Don Dolores had told the truth, that he was a broken-down nobleman, with no fortune, and, the brother of a pirate, had come to Taboga to dwell to find that outlawed brother's buried treasure.

He had been unsuccessful, and he expected to recuperate by marrying his daughter to Captain La Paz, whom he believed to be a rich man, a very rich man, though he had only the Spaniard's own testimony to that effect.

Don Dolores had been most anxious to hide his connection with a pirate, so he now had it held up in terror before him by this mysterious old man, Don Dolores.

It was no wonder then that he was nervous, especially when he feared Captain La Paz.

But Don Dolores had promised to tell the Spaniard how affairs had changed, and that would relieve him; but of course a scene would follow.

As for Camilla she was in that mood that she little cared what her fate might be.

She certainly preferred Don Delos to Captain La Paz, and she was glad of the change.

But she knew the Spaniard well enough to understand that he would swear and fume at her father, perhaps call him out to fight, denounce her and doubtless kill Don Dolores, for he was all-powerful with his vessel's crew at his back.

But yet there was a calmness about the manner of Don Dolores that showed he was not in the least disturbed by the fear of the Spanish captain.

So matters stood when a week after a sail was sighted in the offing.

As it drew nearer it was seen to be the larger schooner of the two that had sailed, in fact the one that had been Juarez Morales's.

Captain La Paz had quietly promoted himself to the command of a larger vessel, sent his old craft home, with a large value upon the one he retained, for prize-money, and a full account, *couleur de rose*, of his capturing the pirate Juarez Morales.

He had stated that he had driven the pirate to "end his days," and only one seaman had escaped.

That he had arranged a duel with the outlaw officers, killed one, and had, as been said, driven the other to destruction.

What that destruction was he did not make known.

In return he had received flattering congratulations from Spain and the Mexican Junta, and the knowledge that a round sum in money was to his credit, while a sword awaited him from the people of Mexico.

He had also done other achievements, in the way of squelching lagoon pirates, and so, flushed with triumph and hope he sailed for Taboga to claim his bride.

The schooner was fairly covered with flags as she sailed into the harbor, and she saluted the little fort, and was saluted in return.

As she appeared Don Dolores had gone down to the home of Don Delos.

He had found the Don and the Señorita Camilla very nervous.

But his quiet mien reassured them.

The Spanish captain landed just at sunset, rowed ashore in his cutter, and, dressed in a gorgeous new uniform, started for the home of Don Delos.

He was surprised and angry not to find his father-in-law elect down to the shore to receive him.

He asked several he recognized about the Don.

"In perfect health," was the reply.

"And the lovely señorita?"

"More beautiful than ever."

So in the gathering twilight he walked on to the comfortable abode of the brother of a pirate.

A servant met him at the gate and bent low before him.

Another met him at the door, and there stood the Don.

He was pale, but grasped his visitor's hand and ushered him into the library where sat Don Dolores and Señorita Camilla.

They both arose, the maiden now equal to the situation, for she said, calmly:

"Welcome back to Taboga, Captain La Paz."

The Spaniard bowed low over her hand and kissed it, and Don Delos presented:

"Our friend, Don Dolores."

Captain La Paz had often before heard of the mysterious dweller at The Castle.

He saw a man of dignified presence rise before him and bow in a stately manner.

"I am glad to meet you, Don Dolores," he said.

But why he was glad he did not state.

He felt a chilly feeling coming over him.

Was he going to get the Chagres fever upon the eve of his wedding?

"And I am glad to see you, Captain La Paz, and I might as well now say to you what I have to tell, though I fear you will not be pleased with the communication."

"Be seated, please."

Captain La Paz sat down, wondering what was the matter.

The Don did not keep him long in doubt, for he said:

"I wish to say, Captain La Paz, that when the Señorita Bianca engaged herself to you she had forgotten another, a prior pledge, that she had made."

"On an occasion ever to be remembered by me, I saved her from drowning on the reef that connects the Morro with Taboga."

"Then, in return for her life, she made me a pledge which a week ago I demanded that she should keep."

"She could not break her pledge, so she broke her compact with you, and will soon become my wife."

"Furies! is this true?" and Captain La Paz glared at Camilla.

She responded with the utmost calmness:

"It is."

"And you will marry this old man?"

"Yes, señor."

"Don Delos, will you allow this outrage?" and the Spaniard wheeled toward the father.

Encouraged by the presence of Don Dolores, and the calm mien of his daughter, Don Delos said:

"Don Dolores holds my daughter to her pledge, and she will keep it."

"By the saints above! but blood shall flow for this."

"If you were not an old man, señor, I would—"

"Hold! my age has nothing to do with it, and for all you know, I may be the younger man of the two."

"I am a man, Señor Captain La Paz, so visit upon me your anger and hatred, for I am responsible."

"It shall be so, and you, too, Don Delos Bianca, I will hold responsible for this insult to me."

"One moment, Señor La Paz," and Don Dolores stepped forward.

"Well, sir?"

"Do, Delos, remember, is to be held responsible after my meeting with you."

"Let me add that your friend can find me at my home at the head of the valley, and that any weapons, any terms will more than satisfy me."

The Spaniard crushed an oath between his teeth and left the room and the house, while Don Dolores smiled grimly, and seemed to be wholly unmoved by the storm he had aroused.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE DON FIGHTS A DUEL.

AFTER the departure of Captain La Paz, a pleasant little supper was had at the home of Don Delos, there being but three persons present, the host, his daughter and Don Dolores.

At an early hour, however, the Don arose to take his leave, and saying to Don Delos that he would perhaps have to call upon him to act as his second, he turned to depart, when an officer in naval uniform appeared.

He was recognized as the first officer of the cruiser.

He bowed with marked politeness, and said:

"Pardon me, but are you Don Dolores?"

"I am, sir."

"I have been up to your home to seek you."

"I come from Captain La Paz."

"Knowing your business, I refer you to my friend, Don Delos."

The officer bowed, and the two entered the house, and while Don Dolores conversed with the Señorita Camilla, her father led the visitor aside and after a short discussion they reappeared.

"It is all arranged, Don Dolores."

"Thank you, señor."

"You meet at sunrise on the cliff near Don Dolores's home."

"When?"

"At sunrise."

"And the weapons?"

"Swords; but if they fail, dueling-pistols at ten paces."

"I thank you, gentlemen."

"Good-night," and the old Don departed with the air of a man who had to perform some pleasant duty.

As he walked along the path leading to his home at the head of the valley, he suddenly started, hesitated, and then throwing up the flaps of his cloak walked on.

But he was no longer indifferent, for he seemed to be on the *qui vive* for danger.

His keen ears had caught a sound that had put him on his guard.

As he neared a thicket of mangoes there suddenly sprung out upon him three men.

One rushed straight upon the sharp point of the Don's sword, and a second was met by a pistol-shot full in the face.

The third was seized in a grasp he could not shake off, his weapons were wrenched out of his grip, and he was hurled to the ground with a force that stunned him.

The trio of assailants had all held long, sharp knives.

But they had caught a Tartar.

Bending over the prostrate forms Don Dolores laid his hand over the heart of each.

"Dead," he said.

Then he turned to the man who sat cowering at his feet.

"Get up and come with me."

The man obeyed in silence.

At the massive door leading within the walled inclosure of his home the Don touched some secret spring.

The door opened and they passed within the flower-garden.

At the door to the mansion he gave a peculiar knock, and it was opened by a man who saluted politely.

"Gomez, send two men with a stretcher down the valley path leading to Don Bianca's until they come upon two dead men."

"Let them bring their bodies here."

"Yes, señor."

"Then do you come to my room and bring irons to put upon this man."

"Yes, señor."

"Come!"

And Don Dolores led his prisoner into his own private rooms.

Taking a seat he let the light fall upon his captive and asked:

"Well, who are you?"

"A poor starving wretch, señor."

"Ah! what clothes do you wear beneath those ragged ones?"

"Señor!"

The Don arose and dragged off the man his outer garb and revealed a seaman's suit.

"Ah! so Captain La Paz sent you on this little errand to assassinate me, did he?"

The man was silent.

"Very well, I will soon have a chance to get even with him; but I guess his duel with young Morales has made him nervous, as he generally would delight in an affair of this kind."

"Speak, sir; did not La Paz arrange this game against me?"

The man was still silent.

The Don arose and opened an outer door.

"Here, Seize, see this man!"

A huge bloodhound entered and eyed the sailor.

"I am waiting for a reply, sir."

"Yes, señor; he offered me big money to waylay and kill you."

"So I thought, in fact, knew."

"Well, my man, after the duel I have with your captain in the morning I will release you."

"Now step into that room and Seize will be your guard."

"If you attempt to escape, then he will see that you do not."

The Don opened the door and the man entered it, followed by the bloodhound.

Then the door was closed, and Don Dolores calmly retired to rest.

He was up early however, had his coffee, and walked out to meet Don Delos whom he saw approaching.

They soon met, and not far behind them came Captain La Paz, his lieutenant and the surgeon.

The captain did not wear his usual smile on such occasions, for he glanced about him anxiously, and he really seemed surprised to see Don Dolores.

The party saluted and walked together toward the cliff.

As they reached the ground, Don Delos said:

"I wish to state that I was attacked on my way home, last night, by three footpads."

"They sprung upon me, but having heard voices ahead I was on my guard, so killed two and captured the other."

"The bodies of the two are in my garden, and the third is a prisoner."

"When this duel is over, señors, the dead and the living are at your service, for the men belong on board your cruiser."

"I am ready, señors."

The Spanish captain was livid now with rage.

He knew that his trick to get rid of Don Delos was known.

But he grasped his sword and took his place in front of his adversary.

What all present had expected would be a desperate sword-fight, proved a disappointment, for Don Dolores disarmed his foe in an instant almost.

The infuriated Spaniard then demanded that another chance be given him with pistols, and the weapons were gotten ready.

The word was given by the Spanish lieutenant, and the duelists fired.

But when the Spaniard touched the trigger he was a dead man, and his shot was a wild one.

The bullet of Don Dolores had crashed into his brain.

"Señor Lieutenant, you owe me thanks for promoting you."

"Send after the body of your late captain, and also for those of the men who attacked me, and the prisoner I hold."

"Don Delos, will you breakfast with me?"

Don Delos accepted the invitation.

He was much impressed with his future son-in-law, and at that breakfast it was arranged that Don Dolores was to marry the Señorita Camilla the next afternoon.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A MESSAGE OF MYSTERY.

THE marriage day of Señorita Camilla Bianca dawned bright and beautiful, and yet she arose with a feeling as though a shadow was upon her.

She had heard from her father the whole affair of the duel, the treachery of Captain La Paz toward Don Dolores, and she knew that the cruiser, with her flag at half-mast, and the body of her late commander on board had at once stood out to sea.

She had escaped marrying the Spanish captain, and was to become the wife of his slayer.

What would be the result, she knew not.

But her love was with Juarez Morales, and for her fate she seemed to care but little.

At noon the day had darkened, for storm-clouds obscured the skies.

Soon after Don Dolores arrived.

He had shaved off his beard, it seemed, and looked much younger without it; but his gray locks remained.

He was elegantly dressed as a Spanish courtier, and he was sparkling with precious gems.

His servant brought with him a superb diamond necklace for the bride, and other rich gifts, all of which he said were heirlooms in his family.

Then, too, he gave to Don Delos a purse heavy with gold.

"A mere trifle," he whispered:

"Only a thousand onzas."

The Don was delighted, and his face showed it.

Padre Polo was there, and in his best robes.

He too received a golden souvenir from the bridegroom.

There were to be no guests, for the two Dons preferred to have it so, and Señorita Camilla was glad that there were to be no one present other than those interested, and the servants.

She looked queenly beautiful in her costume, and with the diamonds and other gems, given her by Don Dolores, sparkling about her.

The time came at last, and the bride and the bridegroom stood before Padre Polo.

The words were said to make them man and wife, and as the congratulations were being uttered, a servant of Don Dolores entered hastily.

He gave to his master a slip of paper upon which several words were written.

The Don betrayed nothing by his face what those words were, but he said:

"We will have the wedding supper now, and then I will leave you, and you, my bride, will rest in your father's care until my return."

He said no more, seemed very cheerful, and an hour after took his departure just as night was beginning to fall.

The air was sultry, clouds hung low, and all betokened a storm.

But for a light breeze that was blowing, the air would have been oppressive.

The Don walked rapidly homeward from the mansion of Don Delos.

"Well, Mambrino, what of this affair?" he asked a servant.

"The vessel appeared, sir, and signaled, and I wrote you the words:

"The Don must leave to-night."

"Will run in for him soon after dark falls."

"Very well, I will be ready; but now let me tell you that no one must know that I am gone."

"Simply say to all inquiries that the Don will see no visitors, will not be disturbed."

"Each day bear to the Señora Camilla Dolores, as she now is, a bunch of flowers with my wishes."

"If I return not within the month, take to her a bag of gold with one thousand onzas, as from her husband."

"This do each three months, if I am away so long."

"If aught should befall me, look in my desk for my papers will direct you what to do, my faithful Mambrino."

An hour later Don Dolores and Mambrino left the Castle and were soon after upon the cliff.

A small vessel was seen coming slowly inshore.

A cavern was near them, and two men stood in its entrance.

"Now," said the Don, and they ran out a beam to which was attached a block and ropes.

The Don then stepped into a box, he grasped the hand of Mambrino, and was then lowered to the waters below, where there was a boat with one man in it.

The box was drawn up, the bar, block and ropes shouldered by the two men, who, led by Mambrino, returned to the Castle.

The Don had by this time reached the deck of the vessel, which at once stood seaward, driven by a fierce gale which now broke over the seas.

"What does this mean?" asked the Don, as he reached the little vessel and took the helm.

"This letter will explain, señor."

And the one addressed placed a sealed package in his hand.

"It was brought by a special messenger, and we came at once," he said.

The Don entered the cabin, and by the lamp read what had been written.

Then he returned to the deck and said:

"Batten down the hatches, close all up tight, and drive her through the seas as though the devil was in your wake."

The crew seemed startled by his vehemence and obeyed, the little vessel fairly flying before the gale, reeling, staggering, plunging, yet still driven relentlessly on her way to her destination, wherever that destination should be.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE SCARLET SCOURGE.

A CHANGE had come over the beautiful cruiser which had been captured by Red Hand, the Rover, for, during the time of her anchorage in the lagoon on the coast of Panama she had been completely metamorphosed.

Her first officer, Juan Mora, was an experienced sailor, and on the run down to the Caribbean he had noted certain changes which could be made in the schooner which would add to her speed.

He knew that she could carry more sail than she did, and he accordingly had that addition made.

Her bowsprit had been made longer so as to fly another jib, and her topsails added to.

Then her royal and top gallant-sails, for she

was a square-sail schooner, had been enlarged by lengthening her spars.

But the changes had not ended here, for the schooner had been painted a bright scarlet, from stern to stern, even to her spars, while every bit of canvas she spread had been painted jet-black.

"There will be no doubt about knowing this vessel, Brule," said Juan Mora to the second officer when the work was done.

"No, and Captain Ronaldo intends that it shall be so," was the reply.

As they were talking Parna came aboard, with one of his own race, a man who had just arrived in a sail pirogue.

Parna said a few words to Juan Mora, who turned and questioned the strange Indian, and then the two hastened ashore.

The result of this visit of Parna and his Indian friend was that the men were brought on board the schooner, from their camps ashore on the hill, and all was gotten ready as though for action.

Three days passed, and one afternoon a boat came off to the schooner and Captain Ronaldo was in it.

He greeted his lieutenants pleasantly, saluted his men, and said:

"We will sail at once, Señor Mora."

"Yes, chief."

"Let me know what there is in this report I hear from Parna."

"An Indian from the Gulf of Darien shores, sir, came to Parna, who is his cousin, and told him that a large vessel-of-war was on the coast."

"He heard some of the officers talking, who had come ashore to hunt, and not seeing him as he lay in hiding, they said that they had to wait there until their Panama coast pilot recovered from the fever, for he was lying aboard in delirium."

"He had been taken ill the day before, after anchoring the vessel in a safe harbor."

"One of the officers said that the captain meant to search the coast for Red Hand's haunt, if the pilot did not recover soon to take the vessel there."

"What was the vessel?"

"A small frigate."

"Ah!"

"And they spoke English, which the Indian understands well, señor."

"And he came and warned Parna?"

"Yes, señor."

"You were in Panama, in search of me?"

"The day after you left, I was chief, for I needed some scarlet paint, there being none of that color on board, as we believed."

"Then, too, I had forgotten to ask you about certain alterations for the schooner, and the men wanted medicines, so I asked Parna to give me cattle that I might overtake you."

"I had already left Panama, Señor Mora."

"In future, never dog my steps."

"Now get out to sea, and we will run down to hunt this vessel up and draw her away from the retreat."

"Without a pilot, I do not believe she can find it; but who the pilot is I cannot imagine."

"Perhaps some one of your crew, who were prisoners."

"By Heaven, but I never thought of that."

"I should have seen to it that each one of those wounded men in the hospital were poisoned, for they held the power certainly to save life by bringing a British vessel-of-war here."

The chief frowned, and his eyes flashed.

It was evident that he had made a mistake, and, but for the warning of the Indian, it might have cost him dear.

The anchor of the schooner was now gotten up, and the boats towed her out of the lake into the channel leading into the Caribbean Sea.

The large ship had been armed, her broadside bearing toward the channel, the brig, too, and the old wreck, while several guns had been put upon the hill, for in his captures at various times, Red Hand had saved the cannon taken.

Parna was left in charge, as before, and with a dozen crippled soldiers, and half a hundred of his own tribe, culled from the mountains in the interior of the isthmus, he was ready to give all foes a warm reception, for Red Hand had ever been the friend of the red-skins, and had had them trained to fight the heavy pieces.

The scarlet pirate schooner, after being towed out of the lagoon, spread her sable sails and sped along the coast under the gathering darkness of night.

The place where the Indian had reported the frigate to be was her destination.

It was just dawn when she ran close inshore and took a look in among the coves and lagoons.

But no vessel was in sight.

"Has the Indian deceived you?" asked Juan Mora.

"No."

"Could we have passed her in the night on our way here?"

"No."

Just then a pirogue with a sail was seen coming out of a lagoon.

It was headed for the schooner and in it there was but one man.

The schooner lay at anchor now, and soon after the *piroque* ran alongside and the Indian sprung on deck.

"It was Tali, the same one who had been to the rendezvous to give the warning of the frigate being on the search for the retreat of Red Hand.

"Well, Tali, what word do you bring?" asked Juan Mora, as he recognized the Indian.

"Big ship go last night.

"Bury man in sea before go.

"Then set sail and go."

"The pilot died doubtless and she gave up the hunt for us.

"Where did she go?" said Red Hand.

"Yonder," and he pointed straight out to sea.

"Very well, we will follow and have a look at her, for I wish to know just who it is that is having a search after me.

"Tali!"

"Yes, chief."

"Did the man they buried reach shore?"

"No, him have iron ball on him, and sink."

"Where was the frigate?"

"Yonder."

"What is the depth?"

"Four fathom."

"Can you dive down and make a rope fast to that body for this gold?"

"Tali can."

"Do so," and Red Hand gave the Indian a hand full of gold.

He departed in his *piroque*, while, getting into a boat, Red Hand was rowed after him.

After a short search the Indian sprung overboard and disappeared from sight beneath the waters.

He was one minute below the surface, and then appeared and was drawn into the boat.

He held a line in his hand, and the other end of it was fast to something below the waters.

"Pull it up," said Red Hand, and soon after a form appeared, enveloped in stout canvas, and with a thirty-two-pound shot attached to the feet.

"Open the canvas at the head."

The order was obeyed, and a face was revealed which caused Red Hand to say:

"It is Dutcher."

"Throw him overboard again."

This was done, Tali paddled back to the lagoon, and the boat returned to the schooner, which at once got up anchor and started out to sea, on the course which the frigate had taken the evening before.

CHAPTER XLIX.

THE PORCUPINE.

THE vessel of which Sir Percy Travis was in command was one of the finest in the British navy.

She was classed as a "small frigate," but she was trim-built as a cutter, and could sail like a witch.

It will be remembered that Sir Percy had set sail in the *Porcupine* to find Lord Leslie Avon in his brig, if he could, and just on board of his vessel, the pilot, Dutcher, who had been in the hospital along with the other wounded prisoners of Red Hand's schooner.

The *Porcupine* had therefore sailed, with the pilot on board, and her crew had been added to by the unexpected appearance of Lionel Harcourt, whose gallant act had gotten for him the berth of a midddy.

The *Porcupine's* crew had kept a close lookout for the brig under Lord Leslie Avon, but had all the while been holding a southerly course, which in the end brought her into the Caribbean Sea, off the Panama coast.

But just here a misfortune occurred in the taking ill of Dutcher, the ex-pirate, who was to serve as the pilot to the retreat of Red Hand.

He was seized with fever, and had only strength to run the *Porcupine* to an anchorage on the coast, where she could remain in hiding until he was able to resume his duties.

But the poor fellow was soon in delirium, and, as the surgeon said that he might die, Lionel Harcourt had asked permission to take the launch and a dozen men and go in search of the secret lagoon.

This Sir Percy, with every confidence in his judgment, had allowed him to do.

So, with a howitzer mounted on the bows of the launch, eight oarsmen, as many marines and a brother midddy as next in command, the young hero started upon his search.

He kept close inshore, and by real good luck failed to be seen by Tali, the Indian, who was going to warn Red Hand of the appearance of the frigate on the coast and the conversation he had overheard among some of the young officers who had gone ashore.

A run of twenty leagues brought Lionel Harcourt the afternoon of the next day to the lagoon he was in search of.

He had noted the lay of the coast, and finding no place all along where a large vessel could enter, on account of the shallowness of the water, for he had taken soundings regularly, he at last came to where was a depth of forty feet.

This convinced him that he had struck the channel and he headed inshore.

The coast seemed like a wall of foliage, only

a few boat-lengths distant; but at last he saw a break, the launch was headed in, the oars were muffled and the lagoon was found.

As night came on the launch lay in hiding close inshore, and so was not seen by Tali as he went by in his *piroque* on his return along the coast.

When he had passed, for Lionel Harcourt dared not attempt his capture, not knowing how far off the retreat was, the launch pulled out and started up the lagoon.

Not a sound was made, and the launch felt its way along until at last the open lake came in sight.

There were fires burning on the hill, to keep off the mosquitoes, and by their light Lionel saw the lake, the old wreck, the ship, the brig and the schooner.

He could tell that the ship and brig were armed on the broadside bearing upon the entrances to the lake.

He also saw that there was a battery upon the hill.

The schooner's red hull and spars, and black sails, were also distinctly visible.

With his glass he swept the whole scene, took in the situation fully, and then gave the order to retreat.

He knew that the scarlet schooner, though metamorphosed, was the cruiser *Destroyer*.

"She appears to be ready to sail, so we have no time to lose.

"Give way with a will, lads," he said.

Down the lagoon swept the launch, and out into the sea.

Keeping close inshore the sails were set, and the wind being fair the launch ran rapidly along on her way some three leagues astern of Tali in his *piroque*.

He went on his way up the lagoon to the camp of his tribe, and missed seeing the launch, which ran alongside of the frigate just at dawn.

Sir Percy had heard it reported, so sent for Lionel Harcourt to come at once to the cabin.

"Well, my gallant midddy, your face tells me you have made a discovery."

"I found the retreat, sir."

"Good! and it is fortunate, for poor Dutcher is dying."

"It is about twenty leagues from here, and I found it merely by sounding as I went along, and running inshore only when I found deep water."

"You have a wise head on your shoulders, Midshipman Harcourt."

"Thank you, sir; but the entrance to the lagoon is so concealed by nature one would not see it thirty paces distant."

"But you unearthed the fox?"

"Yes, sir; I took the launch up the lagoons for over a mile, the water being deep enough for this frigate, and the foliage will not obstruct her."

"There I found a lake, several acres in size, and the camp-fires ashore gave me a chance to see at anchor the cruiser."

"The *Destroyer*?"

"Yes, sir; but she has been painted red, her spars also, and her sails black."

"The deuce you say?"

"Yes, Sir Percy, so I suppose Red Hand intends to be known as the *Scarlet Scourge*."

"Doubtless; but go on with your most interesting story."

"There are in the lake also a merchant brig and ship, both having batteries on the side commanding the entrances from the lagoons, for I think there are several channels."

"On the hill, beyond the lake, where the crew of the schooner appeared to be in camp, is a battery of guns."

"I spent half an hour examining all through my glass."

"Then I retreated, sir, and came on in all haste."

"I did see an Indian in a *piroque*, pass down the lagoon, but he did not discover us, and we failed to see him again, while I was afraid to attempt his capture."

"Midshipman Harcourt, you have done nobly, and, if we capture this retreat of Red Hand, you shall be made a junior lieutenant, for you will have won deserved promotion."

"If Dutcher dies to-day we will sail to-night for the retreat."

"Would it not be well, sir, to stand out to sea, as though leaving the coast, for we do not know what natives may be watching us, and they may have a means of warning Red Hand and put him upon his guard?"

"Ever wise, my lad, and I will follow your suggestion."

"Now go to your breakfast and take the rest you deserve."

CHAPTER L.

THE MIDNIGHT ATTACK.

THE clever ruse of sending the *Porcupine* out to sea, instead of up along the coast, had deceived Tali the Indian, and so Red Hand, in this *Scarlet Scourge* had gone on after the frigate, as he supposed, hoping to overtake her the following day, as he crowded on all sail, and he supposed she would be cruising slowly.

Dutcher, the unfortunate pilot, had died and

been buried, as has been seen, and then the *Porcupine* left her anchorage and headed out into the open Caribbean.

But, after dropping the land well down, she shaped her course for a point which would bring her near the entrance to the lagoon.

It would be no easy matter to find it, in the night; but, as she neared the coast, sail was shortened and every boat sent out with sounding-lines.

The result was that the deep channel way to the lagoon was found very quickly, and then the *Porcupine* was towed shoreward.

It was thought best not to attempt to tow the frigate up the lagoon, but to send out an attacking party in boats.

This was done, and in honor of his services, Sir Percy allowed Lionel Harcourt to take command, giving him the temporary rank of senior lieutenant.

The boats, seven in number, and carrying two hundred men, all well armed, pulled away with muffled oars.

There was hardly a ripple to break the stillness.

Lionel Harcourt led in the launch, and at last the glimmer of lights was seen ahead.

The next moment the camp-fires came in view.

All was quiet on the ships and ashore.

But there was one vessel missing.

The *Scarlet Schooner* was not there.

"She has sailed."

"I feared it," muttered Lionel Harcourt.

But the retreat was there, and there were vessels to capture, pirates to fight.

So the young commander divided his forces.

Two boats were sent against the brig, two against the ship, one to board the wreck and the other two to land and attack the camps.

As soon as the vessels were seized they were to be left with a guard, and the others were to hasten ashore, or where needed.

If driven off, all were to retreat to the lagoon and thence to the *Porcupine*, who could send three more boat crews as a support, and be ready to protect a retreat.

Either they had surprised the pirates, or they were lying in ambush, all seemed to feel, and the latter feeling was a decidedly uncomfortable one for the men to harbor.

When all understood just what was to be done the boats moved forward in four columns.

Nearer and nearer they drew, and at last, as they were almost upon the vessels, a dog on the hill set up a wild and frightened barking.

Voices were heard, and then sung out the clear command of Lionel Harcourt:

"Now, lads, they are our game!"

As he uttered the words the launch dashed alongside of the ship.

In wild alarm the Indian crew sprung to resist, and the battle was begun.

On the brig, the wreck, and the shore as well, the fight had commenced, and wild cries, shots and the clashing of steel was heard.

The Indians in their surprise fired their heavy guns aimlessly, and the roar rung out through the lagoons, telling those on the *Porcupine* that the gallant young midddy had begun the work of death.

The shots, the cries, also were heard and Sir Percy Travis cried:

"There is hot work yonder, but my title on the success of that gallant lad."

Though surprised, the three-score Indians fought like demons, and the score of pirates who were there, crippled or ill, also fought for their lives, and this meant desperate work for all.

The ship was just won, though it had the largest force upon it, and leaving a midshipman in charge, with one boat's crew, Lionel Harcourt dashed toward the brig in his launch, and his coming saved the crews of the two boats from destruction, for they had been beaten back and were under the fire of the heavy guns.

Then the brig was won, the wreck had been taken, and with his launch and two boats following, the young commander had hastened ashore.

The wreck had been set on fire, and its glare made all the lake as bright as noonday.

On the hill Parna stood in the little fort with but a handful of followers, and his wife was by his side.

He had swept the hillsides with his guns, and thrice had beaten off his foes, who had to advance at a great disadvantage.

But landing, Lionel Harcourt led the way with a cry for his men to follow, and they did so with a cheer.

The heavy guns flashed, and a dozen brave tars went down before the cruel fire; but the young leader was unharmed, and the next moment had gained the fort.

Parna would not yield, and stood his ground against all odds, and his wife was by his side, the other defenders also determined to die in their tracks.

"Surrender!" called out Lionel in Spanish.

"No!" was the dogged reply of the Indian chief.

"We will kill you!"

"Kill!" and with the word Parna and his people fired upon the tars.

Then Lionel bounded forward, and his men were at his side.

There were shots, steel clashes, blows, groans, and the retreat of Red Hand had been won—the midnight battle was ended, and the midshipman had won his promotion.

Back to the frigate he sent word of the victory, and with the dawn came Sir Percy Travis in his cutter.

He congratulated the young leader and his men, glanced over the results of the victory and ordered the wounded cared for and the dead buried.

The few prisoners and wounded among the Indians were left in the fort on the hill, and then, with the brig and ship in tow of the boats, the return to open water was begun.

"You will take command of the ship, Lieutenant Harcourt, and carry her to New York, with officers and crew sufficient to aid you, and the brig will also be sent under another officer, while I will cruise in search of this Scarlet Scourge," said Sir Percy.

As the three vessels stood away from the coast, a sail was sighted, and after a close inspection of it, Sir Percy recognized the brig he had been looking for, the Venture, under command of Lord Leslie Avon, and he signaled to his two prizes to come back to an anchorage and all await the coming of the pirate-hunting cruiser.

CHAPTER LI. THE MEETING.

To say that it was a surprise to Lord Leslie Avon, his officers and men, when the brig approached the Caribbean coast of Panama, to recognize the Porcupine, is to express it mildly.

They had left the frigate Porcupine in New York, undergoing repairs, and here she was upon the coast of Panama.

There could be no mistake about it, for Lord Avon knew her well, as did his officers and men who had come over in the frigate from England.

The brig was consequently headed for the frigate and her prizes, and before long signals were exchanged.

The four vessels came to anchor, and Lord Leslie Avon went on board the Porcupine to see Sir Percy.

The officer in charge of his boat was Midshipman Vernon Harcourt.

In the cabin of Sir Percy Travis, Lord Avon heard all that had occurred, and the commander of the Porcupine learned of the cruise of the Venture.

"And you have this gallant fellow with you now, the brother of my favorite young officer, Harcourt, Sir Percy?" asked Lord Leslie Avon.

"He is on board the prize ship, of which I gave him command to take her to New York."

"Indeed! I have a curiosity to see him, and his brother came aboard of your vessel with me."

"I will signal him to come aboard, and you can have your young Harcourt in the cabin here, so that we can see the meeting, which will be interesting, for neither knows, of course, of the other's being here."

And Sir Percy Travis ordered a signal made to bring the young commander of the ship on board the Porcupine, while Vernon Harcourt was sent for to come into the cabin.

Not a word was said to him to give him a suspicion of his brother's presence, and in a little while Lionel Harcourt, in full uniform and wearing the rank of a junior lieutenant, entered the cabin of the Porcupine.

He saluted his commander, was presented to Lord Avon and then his eyes fell upon his brother.

He started, but stepped forward quickly with extended hand.

"Brother Vernon, you here?"

But Vernon Harcourt had turned as white as a ghost.

His lips quivered and he seemed almost overcome by the emotion that thrilled him.

He gazed from his brother to the two commanders, until seeing that he must make an effort to control himself he said:

"Lionel, I am completely overwhelmed. I left you ill, at the point of death."

"Yes, but I recovered, as you see, and thanks to Sir Percy Travis, I have now a place in the king's service, as you have."

"A lieutenantcy."

"Yes, Harcourt, and well deserved, from what Sir Percy tells me."

"But why did you never speak of your brother to me?" Lord Leslie Avon said.

"I have feared, sir, that my brother was dead, for I left him at the point of death, and he was so dear to me that I—"

"I can well understand your feelings, Harcourt; but I congratulate you both upon your success, and your father upon having such sons."

"Which is the elder?"

"That, sir, we do not know," said Lionel.

"Do not know?"

"No, sir."

"And your father is a nobleman, with large estates?"

"Still, sir, he has kept us in ignorance of our age."

"Are you twins?"

"That, sir, I cannot tell you."

"This is strange, for one of you must be the heir to the title and estates of your father."

"As for that, sir, I do not for myself care, and Vernon is welcome to the title and fortune he may inherit, for I hope to win a name and wealth by my sword."

"Well said, Lieutenant Lionel Harcourt, and you have begun right well about it," said Lord Avon.

After some further conversation, Lord Avon accepted Sir Percy's invitation to dine with him, and Lionel asked his brother to go with him on board of the ship, which, after some hesitation he did, and the two were rowed away to the prize.

"There is some mystery in all this, my lord," said Sir Percy, after the two brothers had left the cabin.

"There appears to be, for Vernon never spoke to me of a brother."

"But Lionel did tell me of his brother, for he went to Lord Hammond and asked for an appointment, and was told that as Vernon Harcourt had won one, he must win rank if he wished it."

"Then the young man set to work to do so, and you see how he has done it."

"Yes, and my Lord Hammond will be amazed to find him a lieutenant upon his return."

"He will, in truth; but now about this Red Hand and his scarlet schooner."

"He must be taken."

"True, and we will both cruise for him."

"It is best to send back upon the ship and brig all that we do not need, and then for the frigate and Venture to go in search of the Sea Scourge."

"So I argue," was the reply.

And the two officers sat down to dinner together, while they further talked over their affairs.

In the mean time Lionel and Herbert Harcourt had gone on board the prize-ship, and they sat down for a chat together.

Vernon Harcourt seemed constrained and ill-at-ease, but Lionel was very pleasant, ordered the best dinner his cook could give him, and until the departure of his brother at a signal from the frigate appeared to be perfectly contented with himself and the world in general.

He had told Vernon of how he won his position, and had said:

"It's a race between us now for a captaincy, Vernon."

"Yes; with you already in the lead," was the moody reply.

"So far I have been favored with a chance of doing more to deserve it, for, since my capture of the Sea Shark, the recapture of the Destroyer, my boarding the Porcupine and taking of Red Hand's retreat, has not been a very long while."

Vernon winced at this reference of Lionel's two first acts, when he had been so severely wounded, and ventured:

"I suppose Sir Percy gave you your first advance on account of the capture of the schooner of Red Hand?"

"No, indeed, for I never spoke of the affair, either to him or Lord Hammond Hunter, as I saw that they had gotten us mixed up and regarded you as the one who did that first work."

"I would not of course stand in your light, Vernon."

Vernon Harcourt gave a sigh of deep relief at this.

He had feared that he would stand in a different light in the eyes of Lord Avon, had he discovered that he had served in borrowed plumage.

"I saw afterward, Lionel, that there was a misunderstanding, and it came from my having taken the vessels up to deliver to Lord Hammond, when you were so seriously wounded."

"They were surrendered in my name, and hence the mistake of the sending to me the reward in the shape of an appointment."

"You were lying at the point of death, and I was ordered off suddenly, so I thought I would let all remain until my return, when it could be arranged with you."

Lionel Harcourt made no response, and soon after Vernon took his departure.

A few more men, wounded and invalids, were sent on board the ship, and then the four vessels set sail, the frigate and brig-of-war in search of the Scarlet Scourge, and the two prize-vessels for New York.

CHAPTER LII.

A STORM AND A WRECK.

BOTH the prize-ship and brig were fair sailers, and they went along at an even pace on their course northward.

Several days had they been on the way, when there were signs of one of those fierce storms for which the Southern waters are famous.

The two vessels lay becalmed, a league apart, while the storm-clouds arose most threateningly.

Then it burst with merciless fury, and the sea was so overcast with mist and gloom that they became lost to each other.

The ship, under her gallant young command-

er, met the tempest bravely, breasted the first rude shock, and though she lost some canvas, rode the high seas magnificently.

She was loaded deep with the pirate booty, and she carried a number of guns that were mounted and unmounted upon her decks, and which came from the retreat of Red Hand.

Her crew consisted of but twenty able-bodied seamen, while there were two-score of invalids and wounded men to look after, so that Lionel Harcourt found himself greatly hampered.

But he proved himself equal to the task, and won the admiration of his men as a thorough seaman, as he had before done for his pluck and fighting qualities.

For two days the storm continued, and when at last the winds died down from a tempest to half a gale, a wreck was discovered in the distance.

It was a vessel that had lost her mainmast and bowsprit, and had but the stump of a foremast remaining.

Upon this was flying a signal of distress, so the ship bore away for her.

"It is the brig," cried Lionel Harcourt, as they drew near.

It was, indeed, the brig, and by a strange circumstance the two vessels had been blown in the same direction far out of their course.

"We are sinking, and the men are worn out at the pumps."

"Cannot last much longer and have not a boat left."

So had the lieutenant in charge of the brig said when hailed by Lionel Harcourt.

The sea was yet running fearfully high, and to man a boat in it was a desperate undertaking.

But Lionel Harcourt called out:

"Lower away the life boat, and I want a crew of eight brave fellows to go with me."

"Midshipman Cartright, take command of the ship."

The men cheered when they knew that their commander was going in the boat, for they had perfect confidence in his nerve and skill, and the eight men sprung forward at once.

With much difficulty the boat was lowered, and away it went over the huge waves and plunging sea.

The lee of the wreck was reached, and with the greatest difficulty the wounded and invalids on the brig were first gotten into the boat, and it began its way back to the ship.

Hours passed away and three times had the crew of the life-boat been relieved by others on board the brig and ship; but the daring young commander still held his post, until after six trips the last man was taken from the sinking hull, and one trip had been made to secure all that was most valuable on board.

And not a moment too soon, for the life-boat had not regained the ship on its last perilous trip, when, with a mighty plunge the wreck dove beneath the wild waters.

It was a sad sight to see the brig go down, and Lionel Harcourt at once turned to the duty before him.

The lieutenant in charge of the brig had asked to go home, and so had been given command of the vessel.

He ranked Lionel Harcourt, but at once said that he would be glad to remain as the guest of his brave preserver.

But Lionel asked him, if he would not take command, to at least act as first officer, for he needed help.

With the able force of the brig he had some thirty-five men for duty, with an addition, to his two-score of men laid up, of a score.

The ship had been blown so far off her course that an observation showed her to be to the southeast of the Guadeloupe Islands, and Lionel decided to head northward, passing to the windward of the Bermudas and thus avoiding any pirate craft or foe who might be met by a run through the Indies or nearer the coast of America.

It was while becalmed off the Bermudas that the dawn broke and showed a vessel lying over a league and a half distant.

One glance was sufficient to show what that vessel was.

Her red hull and spars and her black sails betrayed her as the Scarlet Scourge of Red Hand, the Rover.

All was at once excitement on board the ship, but, rushing on deck, Lionel Harcourt's voice rang like a bugle as he called out:

"Every man of you below decks except the old crew of the ship."

No one understood why such an order was given, but it was promptly obeyed, and going into the cabin again Lionel awoke Lieutenant Farwell with the words:

"Red Hand's Scarlet Scourge is a league and a half from us, and of course he will give chase when the wind springs up."

"And we are lost," was the sad response.

CHAPTER LIII. THE CHASE.

In response to the remark of Lieutenant Andrew Farwell: "We are lost!" Lionel Harcourt replied, indifferently:

"Why so?"

"He can readily overhaul and take us."
 "Overhaul us, yes, but not take us."
 "Why not, Harcourt?"
 "I'll tell you, lieutenant, and I know you'll help me out."
 "Gladly."

"When I sailed in this ship from the coast of Panama I had twenty-one able seamen, three midshipmen, a cook and steward besides myself."

"All told twenty-seven."

"True, and on the brig were yourself, two officers, a cook, steward and twelve seamen."

"Seventeen."

"Yes; and seventeen and twenty-seven are forty-four."

"The Red Hand has a hundred, so the prisoners at the retreat said."

"Yes; but then there are a dozen wounded men, slightly wounded only, on board, and fifteen convalescents, who, under the surgeon, can be pressed into service for a fight, and then add an officer and twenty-seven men to our forty-four, making a total of eight officers and seventy-four men to fight."

"I fear it is a weak force, considering that half are invalids or cripples, and we have so few officers."

"Granted; but then there is the surprise."

"What surprise, for I confess I cannot see your game clearly, Harcourt, though let me say I am with you, for I know you."

"Thank you! but to the surprise."

"Yes."

"As the Red Hand does not know that his stronghold is destroyed, he naturally will hardly recognize this ship that was his prize."

"She may look familiar to his sailor's eye, but we have made some changes in the rig and sails as you know."

"True."

"He can tell at a glance that she is a merchantman, and her ports, simply cut on one side for the use of guns when she lay in the lagoon, have been closed up."

"We can saw out ports, and leave them to knock out at the last moment, and we have on board twelve mounted guns, which can be put for broadside batteries."

"A canvas, painted the color of the deck, can be stretched from the top of the bulwark to the deck, and it will hide the guns, and can be torn away in an instant."

"We have a large quantity of small-arms on board, which can all be loaded, giving half a dozen to each man."

"Of course we will run for it, and I'll show only my twenty men."

"We will use every effort to escape, seemingly, and keep it up until night, when the schooner will overhaul us."

"Of course Red Hand will run alongside, if the sea is not rough, and expecting to catch a lamb, will find a wolf, for we will give him a broadside, pour in one volley of musketry and follow it up by boarding in the confusion with our able men."

"I think this will about even us with the pirate, Lieutenant Farwell!"

"My dear Harcourt, you deserve the highest praise, and the Admiralty shall know that you conceived and carried out this daring plot to capture a pirate with a merchant prize."

"I thank you, sir, and we must not know failure in this."

"No; but what a joke it will be upon the Porcupine and Venture."

"Lord Avon and Sir Percy will grow green with envy."

"The Red Hand is still at large, lieutenant; but we will do our best," and taking off his uniform, Lionel ordered his officers to do the same, not to excite suspicion, and arrangements were at once made to carry out his bold plan.

The crew entered into it with a zest that could hardly prevent their cheering, and the surgeon went below to report any wounded and sick men able to appear on deck.

From aloft Lionel saw that the pirate would be unable to distinguish what was going on on his decks, for he could only see that the schooner was crowded with men.

As the calm continued there was a good excuse for spreading the awning, and under this the men worked like beavers to cut the ports and bring the guns into position.

The canvas sheet was painted and stretched along, and worked to a charm.

The Scarlet Scourge had, however, determined to lose no time.

She had seen her prey, and as the calm remained, had gotten out her boats ahead and began to tow toward the ship.

To tow the large ship more than half as fast as the schooner would be impossible; but to keep as much distance as possible from the pirate, Lionel Harcourt ordered out four boats with four men in each, and the vessel began to slowly move.

After a couple of hours it was seen that the schooner was half a mile nearer than when discovered, but it would have been a mile but for the boats ahead.

She was yet considerably over a league away, and as a faint breath of air was felt the boats were called in.

The ship got the breeze first, and, though a light one, began to make headway.

She had placed a quarter of a mile more between herself and the schooner when the latter caught the wind and came along at a brisk gait.

Every particle of canvas that could be set was spread upon the ship, her sails were wet, and everything done to push her along, for it could be seen that the Scarlet Scourge was gaining at a rate that would bring her in range before the afternoon was half-gone.

The wind continued light, blowing for the ship a six-knot breeze, but the schooner was getting seven knots out of it.

"She will overhaul us an hour after dark at this rate, if she does not cripple us before," said Lionel to Lieutenant Farwell.

"You will stand her fire, then?"

"Yes, as long as I can, for I wish to give Red Hand a complete surprise."

Half an hour before sunset the schooner had crept up to within less than half a league.

Then, as though anxious to bring matters to a crisis before nightfall, the schooner's commander opened fire upon the ship.

The first shot flew wild, and in response Lionel ordered the flag of England set.

The Scarlet Scourge already carried the sable ensign at her peak.

The second shot from the schooner went to starboard, the third a trifle to port, and the fourth struck the mizzen-topmast and carried it away.

From that moment the practice was kept up and was good, for the vessel's hull was struck several times, half a dozen men were killed or wounded, and the sails were becoming pretty well cut-up.

The young commander took matters with the utmost coolness and still held on.

The schooner gained, night came on, and she was not half a mile astern.

Then, as in her fury at the persistent flight of the ship under fire, she luffed up and fired a broadside.

It did considerable damage, and the ship came to, as though crippled, though she was well able to continue her flight.

"Now, men, stand by to capture Red Hand, the Rover."

"Yonder craft is freighted with rich booty, and you can get big prize-money, besides rid the sea of Red Hand, the Scourge."

"Let every man do his duty, and the schooner is ours."

"Only grape, remember, for the guns, for we wish to kill the pirates, not harm the schooner, and no mercy must be asked or given until the black flag is hauled down."

"Stand ready, men!"

With this the canvas shields were torn from over the guns, and the supposed sheep awaited the coming of the sea-wolf.

CHAPTER LIV.

HOME AGAIN.

UPON the quarter-deck of the Scarlet Scourge, stood Ronaldo the Red Hand, calmly watching the ship that he considered his game.

He had noted a similarity in the craft to his prize, and yet the idea that it could be his vessel never entered his mind.

The determined flight of the vessel, under his hot fire, had caused him to feel that she was some richly-freighted craft, as well as the fact that she had taken the outward course as though to avoid cruisers.

When the ship came to, at his broadside, he had believed, as Lionel Harcourt had intended he should, that the vessel was crippled.

In looking over her decks, he had concluded that her crew could not number over twenty men, while he had ninety, so he felt no dread of results, especially as he was not aware that the ship was armed.

As the schooner came slowly up, under shortened sail, Red Hand hailed:

"Ahoy, that ship! Who and what are you?"

"The British ship Brisk, from Panama for New York."

"Have you surrendered?"

"I lowered my flag, sir, at your broadside."

"Ay, ay, it is well you did."

Then Red Hand gave an order to his helmsman, and the schooner was gliding up under the stern of the ship, when a sail set forward, drew her broadside round, and the Scarlet Scourge was compelled to lay alongside.

The schooner was not ten feet away when Lionel Harcourt called out:

"Up with that flag! fire!"

The whole broadside of the ship was fired, the guns having been run out at the ports, breaking away the bulwarks where sawed, and the pirates were slain by the dozen under the terrific iron hail.

"Throw your hooks! make her fast! again, fire!"

These orders were obeyed, and then came the order:

"Now, use your small-arms! fire!"

Half a hundred muskets rung out together,

and the schooner, now fast to the ship, had her decks strewn with dead and dying.

The crews of the guns, however, poured in a broadside, and the voice of Red Hand rallied his men.

But the surprise was too great, the death-rate too large to at once gain command of even his well-disciplined crew.

Until the last musket had been emptied, Lionel Harcourt had his men fire upon the pirates, and then, cutlass in hand, with his officers at his back, and his crew following, two-score men in all, he sprung upon the deck of the Scarlet Scourge.

In vain did Red Hand try to stem the onset; they were swept back; but they still outnumbered the crew of the ship, and the result might yet have been doubtful, had not a tall form among the pirates suddenly sprung to the side of Red Hand and struck him a violent blow, while he shouted:

"You shall not die now, Ronaldo, the Red Hand, but live to hang for your crimes."

Then he turned to the pirate crew and shouted:

"Down with your arms, all of you, if you would have mercy!"

Down went the weapons of the pirates, and Lionel, amazed at this sudden turn in the tide, turned toward the one who had so well served him.

"I surrender, sir, Red Hand, his vessel and crew to you."

"I am acting as first officer, and my name is Juarez Morales, who came on board of this craft for revenge."

"I accept your surrender, sir, and thank you for your services."

"Pray aid my officers in looking after your prisoners and wounded," said Lionel.

"This man first," and upon the wrists of Red Hand were slipped a pair of irons, just as he was recovering consciousness, and he was borne into the cabin of the ship.

It was hours before the two vessels were ready to set sail once more, and then they did so with Red Hand a prisoner in the cabin of the ship, and half of his crew in irons in the hold.

The others were on board the schooner, in command of which Lionel had placed Lieutenant Farwell.

The crew of the ship had suffered considerably in killed and wounded, and the broadside she had received had also done much damage; but repairs were made, and the two vessels went on their way southward side by side, the Scarlet Scourge under shortened sail to keep from dropping the large vessel astern.

The next day, in the cabin of the ship, Juan Mora, as I must now again call the young Mexican, told Lionel Harcourt the story of his life, and what he had suffered at the hands of Red Hand.

He did not speak of Larry, the landlord of the Beacon, but said that when in New York he had heard how he could go with Red Hand, and had done so, to avenge in the end his father and sister.

"At the time of the capture of the schooner, sir, I had one-third of the crew who were to follow my lead, and I intended some day to get possession of the craft, put Red Hand in irons and deliver him a prisoner, with his vessel, in New York, asking pardon for all of the men who had sided with me."

"But your pluck thwarted me, Captain Harcourt," he said, with a smile.

"I am not sorry, sir, for my sake, that I did, though I regret it for yours."

"But I am not a captain, Mr. Morales."

"Yet soon will be."

"I hope so; but let me ask you to pick out some of your best men, to help us work the ship and schooner, for we are fearfully short; and as I have lost three of my officers, killed, will you be good enough to aid me?"

"With pleasure, sir," and Juarez Morales, a late lieutenant on a pirate craft, found himself serving as an officer upon a king's vessel.

Owing to the injuries of the ship, the two vessels made slow progress northward, and then they had delays from calms, while they were set back several times by storms.

It was therefore a very long and tedious voyage, and the Porcupine and Venture having both arrived, all were fearful that the prizes had been lost or captured.

Both the Porcupine and Venture had been successful in capturing sea rovers, but their big game, the Red Hand of the Sea, had escaped them in some mysterious way.

That mysterious way had been that the schooner, like the brig and ship, being in the path of the hurricane, had been blown far out beyond the Guadeloupe Islands, and thus his good fortune had favored Lionel Harcourt in coming across the frigate.

It was night when the ship and the Scarlet Scourge arrived off Sandy Hook, and a fog hung upon the waters.

But Lionel Harcourt feared bad weather, so ran in, knowing the harbor thoroughly as he did, and some time before midnight the two vessels dropped anchor off Graystone Hall.

As a light was seen in the library, Lionel Harcourt decided to go ashore, that he might tell

Lord Harcourt all that had happened, and so he ordered a boat lowered, and soon after ascended the broad steps of the grand old home.

A knock at the door brought his father to see who the late visitor could be, for the butler had retired.

The door was opened, and Lionel Harcourt, in his uniform as a lieutenant in the king's navy, stepped into the hallway before the astonished gaze of his father.

CHAPTER LV.

A STORY OF THE PAST.

THE surprise and delight of Lord Rosser Harcourt at beholding his son Lionel before him can be imagined.

True to his word, in the letter he had left for him when he went away, Lionel had returned wearing epaulettes.

Vernon had come back with the Venture, and had visited his father soon after; but he had said little more about his brother than that he had seen him off the coast of Central America, and that he was in a fair way to win promotion.

All about Lionel's achievements he had said nothing.

But Touton had gone up to the town, and he had talked with the crews of the Porcupine and the Venture, and they had given him the whole story, and he had told it to the proud father.

Then the time had gone by when the two prize-vessels should have arrived, and as they came not the greatest anxiety was felt by Lord Rosser and Touton for the fate of Lionel.

But suddenly the brave young man appeared face to face with his father, and he did wear the rank of an officer.

"Come in, my noble boy, and tell me all about yourself."

"And Touton must hear the story, too."

So Touton was called, a decanter of wine, with goblets, was set before the trio, and Lionel began the story of his adventures and rapid rise.

He was very modest about his own deeds, and made light of them; but Lord Rosser had been a naval officer and well knew how hard it was to win promotion without actual deeds of bravery.

"And you have gone beyond Vernon?"

"Yes, father, a step."

"And you saw him in the Caribbean?"

"Yes, sir, and it was a surprise, I assure you."

"He told me that he met you, but he did not speak of your deeds."

"I fear he is envious of you, my son."

"I hope not, sir, for he would have done the same had he had the chances thrown in my way."

"Now tell me about your coming here with the brig and ship, for you left off at where you were caught in a tornado."

Lionel then went on to tell of their finding the brig a wreck, after the storm, the rescue of her crew, and then of the meeting of the Scarlet Scourge in the calm.

"And the pirate?" eagerly asked Lord Rosser.

"Lies at anchor off Graystone, sir, just astern of the ship, for I captured her."

Lord Rosser and Touton both sprung to their feet, and together they cried:

"And the Red Hand?"

"Is in irons in my cabin, sir."

"Great God!"

Lionel looked from his father to Touton.

Both were deeply moved, the face of the nobleman livid, his lips quivering.

"This must not be."

"Father!"

"Lionel, your capture of this man forces me to unseal my lips, to tell you the truth, and then you will understand when I say that Red Hand the Rover must go free."

"Father, I—"

"Boy, hear what I have to say, and I speak before Touton because he knows all."

"I must go back and unfold to you a story of the past."

"As you know, our family is an old one, and a proud one."

"I had a brother who was my senior; but by a year only."

"He grew up to be a wild boy, and in his twelfth year was stolen by Gypsies."

"My father spent large sums to get him back; but at last proof was brought to him that the boy died in the Gypsy camp and was buried."

"The remains, those of a boy of fourteen, were brought home to Oak Mere Castle in England and buried, and I became the heir to the title and estates."

"When in the Mediterranean, commanding a British brig-of-war, I captured an Algerine corsair, and her chief asked to see me alone."

"In that chief I recognized my brother."

"He told me how he had been stolen, by order of a Gypsy queen whom our father had wronged, and that he was afterward, when the tribe were in Spain, sold to a Moorish captain of a trading vessel."

"To escape had been impossible, and he had been at last sent on board a corsair and had risen to an officer's position, when, by the chief's death, he became *Rais*, or captain."

"His wonderful adventures would fill a book, and he proved to me, by his talking English, by his remembrances of Oak Mere Castle, its scenes and servants, and in another way, beyond all doubt that he was my brother."

"He asked only that I should save his life and allow him to keep the jewels he had with him, and said that he cared never to return home, and wished still to be considered dead."

"At his earnest entreaty I was tempted, and let it so be."

"I set him free as an Englishman who had been a Moorish captive, and we parted."

"At that time our father was living, and I was pledged to marry a lovely girl, the daughter of a peer."

"I had loved her from her girlhood, and our fathers had pledged that we should be married, even from the time she was ten years of age, as soon as she was out of her teens."

"I had not seen her for four years, and when I returned home I was horrified to be told that she was married and the man she wedded was supposed to be me."

"My brother had returned home, and, as our father was dead, and only several old servants were at Oak Mere, he readily passed himself off for myself."

"He knew I would not return for months and the Satan in him caused him to play this freak, which, as they had not seen me for years, and he was strangely like me, could be done, as you may understand."

"He met Lady Luling, for such was her name, urged an immediate marriage, as he had to return to his vessel in foreign seas and wished her to accompany him."

"They were quietly married, and she departed with him."

"Then I returned and the fraud was exposed."

"But I did not make it known that the man was my brother."

"No, I kept that a secret."

"Strangely like Lady Luling was her sister, Lionelle Luling, and her sympathy for me won my heart."

"With her sister lost to me, I asked her to become my wife, and we were married."

"I threw Oak Mere open, and she reigned there as mistress, while I again went on a cruise after the birth of a son."

"Was I that son, father?"

"Wait and see."

"For a long time no word came to me of my wicked brother."

"One day, when in a foreign port, I fell in with a small funeral procession that was moving out to the little burying-ground of the small village."

"There were not half-a-dozen in the party, the sexton leading, four men following carrying the coffin, and the mourners were a woman with a child in her arms."

"The body was buried in a quiet spot and the men went away, the woman and child remaining."

"I was struck by the face of the child, as well as that of the woman, and asked who it was that was dead."

"The woman replied that it was her mistress, an English lady, who was the wife of a Moorish captain who spent most all of the time at sea."

"I asked the name of the little boy, and I started when I heard it."

"Then I told the woman that I was English. I asked if the lady's name had not been Lois, and told her that the dead woman was my sister, for, my son, she was the one I had loved, the one my brother had robbed me of."

"The woman took me to her little home, a pretty home it was, too, and charmingly furnished; but she told me the lady had not been happy, for she seemed to dread her husband, who yet seemed to idolize his wife and their boy."

"The woman was married, and her husband was interpreter to the port commandante, while, to help along expenses, she had accepted the place of lady's attendant and nurse to the child."

"I found that the husband was not expected home for months, and then I decided to act."

"I knew that my brother was nothing more than a corsair, again under the Moorish flag, and I told the woman to go after her husband."

"Then I made them my confidantes, and told them all, and offered them large remuneration to go with me, taking the child, and leaving no clue to where they had gone, or the fate of the mother and little one."

"Urged by justice rather than gold, they consented, and the body of poor broken-hearted Lois was taken to England and secretly buried."

"Upon my return I found my wife in ill-health, and she soon after followed her sister."

"Then, leaving Oak Mere under the care of faithful servants, with my son, and my brother's, the noble nurse and the man who has ever since been my true friend, I moved from port to port, and at last came to America."

"Those two boys, you and Vernon, I raised as my own sons, and on the way across the sea we buried poor Aleta, the woman who had been as a mother to you both."

"Her husband, my son, is before you in your faithful friend Touton."

"I expected it, and he is true as steel," and Lionel held out his hand and grasped that of Touton.

But Lionel did not yet know the truth, as to whether he was the son of Lord Rosser or Vernon was.

CHAPTER LVI.

THE MERCY THAT CAME TOO LATE.

"LIONEL," said Lord Rosser, after he had been silent for some minutes, as though to allow the young man to think over what he had told him, "I came to America, hoping to build here for my own son a home, and trusting that never again would my brother cross my path. I was disappointed in the latter, for I will tell you that the man known as Red Hand, the Rover, is my brother."

"He has a birth-mark which brands him—a red hand, and the wrist encircled by a mark of a chain."

"He swam ashore after your capture of his vessel, hid in my boat-house, and I saw him there and gave him a little aid."

"Then I heard of his having cut out the schooner, and captured Vernon on board."

"Now he is your prisoner, and he knows you only as my son."

"The fate of his wife and child he never knew, and I give him the credit for at least having devotedly loved them."

"He believes you to be my son, as he believed Vernon to be, and so tried to kill him, not then knowing of your existence, so that if he should be killed, and his son be found, he should be Lord of Harcourt."

"Now you know, Lionel, why you must set that man free."

"Go on board your vessel, and I will accompany you and unlock his irons, allowing him to escape from the stern-port and swim ashore."

"Touton can meet him and take him to a hiding-place in the tower of this house."

"Then, if he will vow to live a different life, I will aid him to return to England, tell his story and claim the title and estates, for I have a fortune independent of his."

"If he refuses, then he can go his way to one day die upon the gallows."

"You will do as I wish, Lionel?"

"I cannot refuse you, father."

"Then come."

Together they left the house, and Touton followed at a distance.

Springing into his waiting boat, Lionel ordered the men to give way, when his father was seated in the stern-sheets by his side, and they were soon on board the ship.

Juarez Morales met them at the gangway, and Lionel presented him to his father, adding:

"As I did not wish to remain long away, my father came aboard to spend an hour with me."

Then they entered the cabin and Lord Rosser, as he was known, went to the state-room of the real nobleman.

"We meet again, Ronald."

"Yes, and it will be the last time, for I shall hang."

"I have come, Ronald, to tell you that I will give up the title and estates, and aid you to secure all if you will vow to live an honest life."

"I cannot, for Satan has too strong a hold upon me. My life has been different, Rosser, from yours, though it was not of my making at first."

"I was reared in a Gypsy camp to steal and lie, I was forced to be a corsair, and so I became what I am."

"Never mind me; only let me die as I have lived without fear, and I will keep the secret that we are brothers. I only wish that I knew the fate of my wife and child."

"I will tell you," and Lord Rosser told all, and the Red Hand, for the first time in his strange life since childhood, felt tears come into his eyes.

"It is better so, Rosser; but is it my own boy that has brought me to the gallows?"

"Thank God, no! it is my son! It was your own son, Vernon, whom you tried to kill when he sprung overboard from your vessel."

"Great God! if I only had, how much more accursed I would have been!"

"Come, Ronald; I have brought you gold and will set you free. When my son and myself go on deck, slip out of your state-room, take this rope and lower yourself into the water. Swim for the shore, go to the pier at my home, and a man will meet you there and take you to a safe hiding-place."

"Then I will see that you escape from the country, and in another land I hope you will lead a different life."

"Now, go, for you are free of your irons, as soon as we go on deck."

Lord Rosser turned away, and, a moment after, father and son went on deck, as though the former was going to return ashore.

They walked forward, talking together, when suddenly they were startled by a loud command:

"Hold, or I fire!"

Then came a shot and a splash almost together, followed by another splash.

Lionel had run aft, shouting:

"Man overboard!" and a voice hailed him from the waters:

"I have him, sir, and my shot wounded him. It is one of the pirate prisoners escaping!"

It was Juarez Morales who spoke. His quick eye had detected the escaping Red Hand.

The boat waiting alongside was now at the spot, and the Mexican and his prisoner were drawn into the boat, and soon after were on board the ship.

The pirate chief was borne into the cabin, and Lord Rosser and Lionel bent over him, and heard:

"It has come at last. Better by the bullet than the rope."

"Good-by, Ros—" The whisper died away, and Ronaldo, the Red Hand, was silent with the dread silence of death!

Upon his upturned face dropped a tear from the eyes of his brother.

And Juarez Morales, who had fired the fatal shot, had avenged those he loved.

CHAPTER LV.

CONCLUSION.

WHEN the prize-ship, accompanied by the schooner Scarlet Scourge, sailed up to the town the next morning, the forts thundered a salute which the King's Own and Porcupine and the brig Venture echoed, for there was no doubting that the vessel considered lost had returned and brought with her the schooner of Red Hand, the Rover.

Rank was forgotten for the once, and Lord Hammond Hunter, Captain Sir Percy Travis and Captain Lord Leslie Avon very quickly rushed aboard of the ship, for upon her deck they saw Lionel Harcourt and Lieutenant Farwell.

Then the latter told the story, and all listened with amazement and admiration at the deeds of the young commander, from the rescue of the brig's crew, to the dropping anchor in New York Harbor.

Juarez Morales was presented, and every good word said for him, while Lord Hunter Hammond remarked:

"I must say, sir, I am angry with you for having cheated the yard-arm of its just prey by killing Red Hand; but then I suppose after what you have suffered you also regret that he did not die at the end of a rope."

Lionel's hand was shaken over and over again, and the august passengers then went into the cabin to view the body of the dead sea rover.

There it lay, in his brilliant outlaw uniform, and over it was spread his sable flag.

"I will stand out to sea, sir, and bury the body from the Scarlet Scourge," said Lionel, adding:

"I brought it here, gentlemen, for you to see that Ronaldo, the Red Hand was surely dead."

"Do so, Lieutenant Harcourt, and let me now say to you that I have learned how your brother deceived me, winning fame and rank on your deeds."

"For the sake of what he has done in the service and the distinguished name he bears I have allowed him to resign from the service, and but yesterday received his resignation."

"I regret this exceedingly, sir, for I am sure Vernon meant to do no wrong."

"You are kind to say so; but he not only meant it, but did so, and as you have proven yourself so well able to command a vessel, I will advance you to senior lieutenant, and place you in charge of the Scarlet Scourge for special dispatch duty; but what will you call the craft now?"

"The Lady Mildred, sir, in compliment to Sir Percy's daughter, for to him I owe my advancement," and Lionel blushed crimson.

"Then the Lady Mildred shall the schooner be, and when she has been painted a different color, we will drink to her and to her namesake," said Lord Hunter.

"And, sir, I would like to ask to make a cruise in her, for Juarez Morales tells me he is sure he can find another retreat of Red Hand's, where he has hidden his vast treasure."

"You shall have cruising orders to find the treasure, Lieutenant Harcourt, for we will be only too happy to add to the king's exchequer, and the prize-money of yourself and crew by finding a fortune."

The prisoners were then taken ashore, along with the sick and wounded, and the body of Red Hand was conveyed to the Scarlet Scourge which at once stood out to sea, and off Sandy Hook, with the shadows of night resting upon the waters, the man whose life had been so strange, was lowered into the depths of the ocean, enveloped in his own sable colors.

The booty on board the schooner and ship proved to be very large, and was turned over to Lord Hammond to value for prize money.

Some weeks after the schooner, no longer wearing her scarlet hue, and with snow-white sails and crew of eighty honest tars, was baptized the "Lady Mildred," that dainty lady for whom she was named being herself on board and hoisting her new silk colors, which she had presented, over her decks.

The following day the Lady Mildred set sail

for the distant island of Taboga, off the coast of Panama, Juarez Morales on board, the guest of her young commander.

It was a long run to Taboga, but at last the schooner dropped anchor in the little harbor.

Morales, under the protection of the British flag, had no fear of going ashore, and, with Lionel Harcourt, sought the home of Don Delos Bianca.

But the Don had been gathered to his fathers, and his home was held by Padre Polo as an abode. The worthy priest told the visitors that the Señora Dolores was a dweller in the home of her husband, who was supposed to be dead, as he had disappeared mysteriously from the island.

But when he saw the beautiful girl he had loved, Juarez was startled, for she was but a wreck of her former self.

In making her home at the Castle, she had discovered, through a dying servant, that the man she had married was Red Hand the Rover, who had, disguised as an old man, masqueraded as Don Dolores and had brought all of his treasure to the island to hide.

And more, she was told that he had come there from having been left maps by a brother corsair, who had there hidden his treasure, and left it to him.

In the cavern beneath the Castle this treasure was found, and carried on board the Lady Mildred, for having been told of the fate of Red Hand, the Señora Camilla was anxious to leave the island, and Juarez Morales told her that she must recover and become his wife.

Yet even with this hope the poor woman was unable to rally, and one day, some weeks after the Lady Mildred left Taboga, she died, and was buried at sea.

It was just a year after her arrival in New York Harbor as the Scarlet Scourge, that the schooner-of-war, as the Lady Mildred, again dropped anchor off the town.

Again she was saluted with heavy guns from forts and ships-of-war, and when it became known that she had brought back the vast treasure which had been hidden away by the Red Hand, she was indeed made welcome.

Soon after her arrival, Juarez Morales went to the home of Lawrence Laurie, no longer known as Light Horse Larry, or Lawrence & Co., for he had taken the hint—or the young Mexican, when he was before in New York, to "sell out," and had, as "Landlord Larry," and "Lawrence & Co.," disposed of the Beacon Inn and his shop for the sale of high seas booty; then he had purchased a handsome residence up-town in the fashionable quarter, and, as Lawrence Laurie was known to his friends, and was also noted for having a very beautiful daughter and a vast deal of wealth.

Somehow the bright eyes of Esther Laurie won the thoughts of the young Mexican from grieving over his lost lady love of Taboga, and it was not very long before they became man and wife, and all spoke of what a splendid couple they were, but only Lionel Harcourt and Larry knew of the secret of the past in their lives.

From the day that he had left the navy, Vernon Harcourt had not been heard from. He had drawn his prize-money in bulk, written a letter to Lord Rosser telling him that he had tried to take the laurels from his brother, and more—had attempted to poison him when he sat up that night with him at the time he lay so severely wounded; but now he would never cross the path of a Harcourt again; he would be as one dead to them forever. Then he had gone his way, no one knew, few cared, whither.

Lionel won his captaincy soon after he was twenty-one, and with it a wife, for Lady Mildred would have become "Lady Harcourt," had not the breaking out of the War of Independence caused her husband to relinquish all claim to Oak Mere and its title, and decide to be an American citizen!

But, "Lady Mildred," as she was still called by courtesy, was happy in Graystone Hall the idol of her husband and the joy of Lord Rosser Harcourt, as well as of Tonton—Ignacio Tonton, the Italian interpreter.

When the War of the Revolution broke out Lionel Harcourt was given command of a vessel-of-war, by the Continental Congress, and Juarez Morales received the rank of first lieutenant, and was appointed to the ship of his devoted friend.

That they both won greater distinction the annals of American history would show, did I dare give the names of the heroes who had hauled down the sable flag of the Sea Recreant.

THE END.

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